

POLITICAL IDEAS OF PAULO FREIRE

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" I want to learn how to read  
and write so I can get out  
from under the shadow of  
others "

-- a peasant

**PREFACE**

## PREFACE

Decolonisation has left in its wake a set of crucial problems which still remain unresolved in many of the developing countries. One such critical problem confronting the undeveloped countries is the lack of any philosophy of education or an educational system that will be more meaningful to the very basic objective of "development" as distinguished from mere "modernisation". Innumerable ideas have been put forward by educationists over a period of time. Few, however, have propounded in recent times, as novel and as challenging an educational philosophy as Paulo Freire, a Brazilian pedagogue.

The significance of Paulo Freire's contribution lies not simply in the sphere of pure pedagogy, but more importantly, in the sphere of human and societal development. Freire's objective is to provide the oppressed masses of the newly emerging and decolonised countries with the wherewithal for creating a new society, in the making of which they will participate and in the culmination of which they will discover their true identity.

Admittedly, Freire's relevance in terms of his insights into human development and in evolving a psycho-social methodology for adult education for the masses of the "Third World" is undeniable. To the "First World", too, which is passing through a period of crisis, with its emergent problem of alienation of different kinds and dimensions, Freire's message is equally important.

Shortcomings and weaknesses in Freire's method of education may be identified and even accepted. Nevertheless, his diagnosis of the social and psychological deprivations of the victims of the "culture of silence", especially in the colonised regions of the world, is unquestionably valid. That is where the positive contribution of Freire lies. The study undertaken by me is primarily concerned with the core ideas of Freire upon which he has evolved his new methodology for adult education. The present dissertation, therefore, is a modest effort to delineate the philosophical underpinnings of Freire's education. His system of education is based on an understanding of a society, or for that matter a community, in which it is applied or implemented. His concept of man, the latent potentialities reposed in human beings and the distinction that man enjoys as against the animal world are the significant contributions of Paulo Freire to the realm of ideas. To Freire's man, "nature" is not a given, to him "culture" is his own creation -- that again distinguishes him from the rest of the living beings. Freire attributes a new connotation and meaning to the word "to live". Man alone is a "living being". It is this aspect of "living" that offers a potential and an opportunity for "development" -- a development which is intrinsic and in-built. The long and listless experience of this human being has made him a tragic victim of the "culture of silence" to a point that he has become a silent and abject citizen with no inkling for criticalness. The key to the breakthrough, according to Freire,

is conscientizacao ("consciousness raising"). To Freire, therefore, conscientisation is education and it is only through that kind of education is development possible.

It is against this background, that the dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter I is an attempt at introducing Paulo Freire as a man born and bred in the colonial milieu of Nordeste Brazil. In Chapter II, Freire's concept of man and the features that distinguish him from other living but "existing" beings are enumerated, and Freire's understanding of man's culture and history are briefly discussed. Chapter III tries to depict his definition of the "culture of silence" in which the masses are immersed. Also, the dichotomy between the processes of "modernization" and "development" which Freire brings out are examined. Chapter IV outlines the philosophical roots of Freire's theory of action-in-reflection and praxis. The Vth and final chapter is a brief summary of the entire dissertation highlighting some of the criticism levelled against Freire's contribution and the positive elements of his political ideas.

The study is mainly based on the written works of Paulo Freire which I was fortunate to obtain from the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland. I have in addition received some recently published material from Paulo Freire. Interviews with Paulo Freire by a variety of people have also been examined.

I am greatly indebted to my Supervisor, Dr. R. Narayana: for his invaluable comments and guidance at every stage of the

preparation of this dissertation. However, the blame for all errors and lapses of judgment is entirely mine. I am also grateful to all those who have helped me in the slightest way in the completion of this study. Finally, I would like to thank my husband who has been a constant source of inspiration through the completion of this dissertation.

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**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional theories of pedagogy have treated man as an object into which superior beings poured knowledge. The treatment of man as an 'object' is, even today, prevalent in the education system. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the role that education might play in social and human development.

The interpretation and assessment of the role of education, in terms of its content and technique, in societal change has assumed considerable importance in recent times, especially so in the developing countries of the Third World. Policies on education are evolved not only with a view to transmit and impart 'knowledge' and 'culture' from generation to generation, but more importantly, to create an awareness in the people and to help mould a meaningful and purposive society. Such a need is increasingly and acutely felt in countries which till recently had been under the yoke of colonialism.

Though the basic tenet of the education policies of the imperial powers in their colonies was to bring the people out of their traditional hierarchies, they, in the process, brought them into other kinds of hierarchies -- for example, capitalist hierarchies. While this process had elements of liberation, it also included, importantly, elements of dependency and alienation. The structure of the education system, since it came from the metropole, was based in large part on the needs of

the metropole culture. In other words, education was colonialistic and helped to promote passive responses from the colonised people stifled by the political and economic system of the colonisers. The colonial element of education was its attempt to 'silence' the masses and to gain acceptance for structures that would perpetuate the colonial system.

Paulo Freire, a leading revolutionary educationist, has suggested a set of novel means for breaking the chains of colonialism. His pedagogical method, set in the Brazilian context, attempts to create an authentic ethnic awareness amongst the oppressed people. It is therefore obvious that Paulo Freire's method is closely linked to politics -- the concepts of decolonisation, nationalism and socialism are strewn throughout his writings.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to analyse the political content of Freire's ideas on education. To begin with, a brief examination of the colonisation process in Brazil would facilitate a better understanding of the context of Freire's writings, as this would help to place Freire at a moment and time in history.

### Brazil's Colonial Experience

Brazil was first discovered in 1500 and it passed almost unnoticed, overshadowed by more illustrious exploits of Portuguese navigation. Brazil was almost ignored for thirty years as the explorers did not find anything other than brazil-

wood. According to an early chronicler, Huguenot Leon de Levy, one of the first to record native life in Brazil before the arrival of the conquerors across the seas, the Brazilian life was "one of peace and tranquillity . The conquistadores respected, at least to some degree, the communal property system that was characteristic of Brazilian pre-history. This relationship with the Indians apparently existed until 1532, when the institution of royal land grants, or captaincies, was introduced. From then on, the enslavement of the Indians became commonplace and spread to all regions".<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of the captaincy system of colonisation, it was no longer simply a question of bartering raw materials from the natives of Brazil and shipping them to European markets, but of clearing and working the land itself. Into this endeavour, the more enterprising members of the Portuguese nobility threw themselves. With this conquest began serious efforts at colonisation. And with the process of colonisation began the domination.

Sartre has an exacting definition for this process: "The coloniser can only exonerate himself in the systematic pursuit of the dehumanisation of the colonised, by identifying himself a little more each day with the colonialist apparatus. Terror and exploitation dehumanise and the exploiter authorises

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1. Josue de Castro, Death in the Northeast (New York, 1969) p. 70.

himself with the dehumanisation to carry the exploitation further".<sup>2</sup> To accomplish their objectives, the colonisers in Brazil took into their hands "the mission of putting the land to work and undertook to impose their will upon the native population, to expropriate the Indians' land and goods, to force Portuguese ideas down their throats and to transform them into docile agents".<sup>3</sup> With this started the new culture or the "culture of silence", as Paulo Freire refers to it. The development of the conquered territory into a true colony required new legal institutions and new forms of land ownership which could flourish only when primitive institutions were eliminated.

History shows that in all colonisation processes the mother country invariably attempts to transplant in the colonies the economic and political institutions which will mostly tend to perpetuate control by the homeland. As Josue Castro observes: "When economic coercion is brought into play and cannot maintain control, other forms of coercion are used, even if they are economically self-defeating".<sup>4</sup> Land still remained the most fundamental production unit.

It was when the population of Brazil was going through a traumatic experience that a miraculous product appeared which

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2. Jean Paul Sartre, The Colonizer and the Colonised, (New York, 1965), p. 8.

3. Castro, n.1, p. 72.

4. Ibid., p. 78.

was to change the whole course of Portuguese and Brazilian history. The product was sugar. The area chosen as the most fertile for this product was the Northeast. Soon sugar came to dominate the Brazilian economy. The development of sugar economy graphically depicts the fundamental difference between that economic development which must benefit large sectors of the population and the spurious colonial type in which the masses have no share and no possibility of access to decision-making.

As far as the economy of the Northeast was concerned, we see that only the dominant minority prospered and progressed while the masses were always left outside and looking in -- a mere reservoir of manpower. The gap between the elite and the masses was unbridgeable as there was no emergence of a middle class as a consequence of the lack of social mobility.

As the domination by the coloniser increased, the colonised deteriorated as a "critical" human being and degenerated into an "oppressed" being. Paulo Freire describes the process as follows:

Apart from direct concrete material possession of the world, the oppressor consciousness cannot understand itself. The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of men, men themselves, time, everything is reduced to the status of objects of its disposal.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Ibid., p. 78.

5. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (London, 1975), p. 34.

Amongst the poor a feeling of resentment, humiliation and the burning urge to revolt against oppression never found a way to pass from the level of suppressed antagonism to social explosion. And this collective impotence continues to this day -- a state of acquiescence, apathy, social torpor have become entrenched in these people. The inhabitants of the Northeast seem "anaesthetised".

Albert Memmi has described the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised thus:

If his [the coloniser's] living standards are high, it is because the colonial one is low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labour and servants, it is because the colonised can be exploited by the laws of the colony; if he can easily obtain administrative positions, it is because they are reserved for them; the more freely he breathes, the more the colonised is choked.<sup>6</sup>

The anaesthetisation, indeed the cretinisation, of the colonised was exacerbated by the imposition of institutions upon them. For example, one of the main agents for the total lack of any critical consciousness was the church. The traditionalist church is still very colonial; it is a missionary church in the worst sense of the word. They play an important part in moulding the minds of the natives and they give rise to a culture that is naive and other-worldly. Their belief is that the more the human beings suffer the more they purify themselves,

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6. Albert Memmi, n.2, p.8.

eventually reaching heaven and eternal rest. Work is looked at, not as the work or action of men and women in the world, but rather as the price paid for being human beings. Such an understanding of life and destiny, provided convenient justification for oppression and fatalism at specific moments of historical experience. Christian Lalive, the Swiss sociologist, calls this type of existence "the Heaven of the Masses".<sup>7</sup> The more the masses are drowned in the 'culture of silence', with all the attendant violence on the part of the oppressors, the more they take refuge in the womb of the church. The church, therefore, is by no means apolitical. Freire writes:

Forbidden as a subordinate social class to have their say, they fool themselves that the prayers are for salvation; their voice in their 'heaven' a genuine form of speaking out.... They hope to reach transcendence without passing by way of the mundane; they want meta-history without experiencing history; they want salvation without knowing liberation.<sup>8</sup>

The acceptance of what Freire refers to as "this historical anaesthesia"<sup>9</sup> is the doing of the church and is characteristic of most backward closed societies. The church has always maintained a close link with the ruling classes and has remained practically unchanged throughout the modernisation of these societies. As such, the church has been a definite retarding influence on progress, liberation and development of a critical consciousness.

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7. Christian Lalive, Heaven of the Masses, (Brazil, 1969).

8. Paulo Freire, Education, Liberation and the Church, (CCP Documents 7, Geneva, 1975), p. 9.

9. Ibid.



### Consequences of Colonisation

The result of the colonisation of Brazil was three-fold: (i) a society in transition; (ii) a society lacking in democratic experiences; and (iii) a society lacking in critical consciousness.

The 'period of transition' began as early as the 1920s. Under the aegis of modernisation, the process of industrialisation had started in the urban centres of the country, especially in the south-central region. Industrialisation received a further impetus from the international economic crisis of 1929 and gained acceleration by the beginning of the Second World War. The result was a partial awakening of the masses of the people. People who were once oppressed and steeped in the 'culture of silence' were for the first time becoming aware of their oppression. The process of emergence was connected to a process of rebellion which expressed itself in the form of demands and protests. A different style of politics emerged -- the populist style.

The populist leaders acted as intermediaries between the ruling classes and the masses of the people, through a government which was at the same time paternalistic and authoritarian. One of the main effects of the populist approach to politics on the part of the leadership was an increasingly demanding attitude on the part of the masses. As Freire points out:

Insofar as their demands are met, the masses will tend not only to increase their frequency, but also to alter their nature. Thus, the populist approach will also end up creating serious contradictions for the power group. It will find itself obliged either to break open the culture of silence or to restore it.<sup>10</sup>

Freire illustrates his point with the example of the overthrow of the Goulart Government in Brazil by a military group in 1964.<sup>11</sup> The military junta, while labelling their action as a revolution, followed "a consistent policy of servility towards the metropolis and the violent imposition of silence upon their own people". According to Freire:

A policy of servility towards the metropolis and rupture of the internal culture of silence would not be viable. Neither would a policy of independence towards the metropolis while maintaining the culture of silence internally.<sup>12</sup>

However, a characteristic of the period of transition is the changing attitude of the people. They are now beginning

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10. Paulo Freire, Cultural Action For Freedom, (London, 1975), p. 60.

11. In 1963, Joao Goulart was elected as the President, following the resignation of Janio Quadros with the support of the centrist and leftist elements. The Goulart regime like its predecessor regime was a progressive government much to the discomfiture of the reactionary and conservative elements of the Congress and the military establishment. According to some writers the coup engineered by the military became a fait accompli the moment Goulart became President.

12. Ibid., p. 61.

to emerge, they are no longer content to look on as spectators; they have abandoned their attitude of passivity and expectance and have demanded their right to interfere and decide. The transition from one type of society to another is inevitably accompanied by tensions and conflicts between the old values and the new.

The Brazilian people have no critical awareness of the reality. This means that the characteristic weakness of this type of awareness is widespread among the Brazilian people: over-simplification of problems, tendency to gregariousness, emotionalism, a preference for fabulous or magical rather than rational explanations. This state of affairs prevents the Brazilian people from actual development.

As Freire sees it, one of the most striking features of Brazilian society is its lack of experience in democracy. This is the product of colonisation.

Our type of colonisation, based on exploitation, with the huge plantations -- in which the master had all power, not only over the land but even over the human beings on it -- and slave labour by the natives and, later, by the African, was not such as to create conditions in which Brazilians could develop a flexible, open-minded attitude characteristic of a democratic cultural climate. Nor were later, paternalistic solutions any great improvement on this point of view.<sup>13</sup>

With the onset of de-colonisation educational policy-makers and educators of the Third World countries are increasingly

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13. Freire, n.8, p. 14.

feeling the anomaly, if not the inadequacy, of the colonial educational structure to their development programmes and objectives. It is in this atmosphere of transition and uncertainty that Freire as a pedagogue felt the need for a new kind of education. Freire says:

My concern was not in terms of finding a method which helped people to read and write quickly and mechanically. I was convinced that the fundamental aspect of literacy process would be to challenge the illiterates to make them discover that as human beings their main task was to make history and not just to be made by history.<sup>14</sup>

#### Freire's Perception and Experience of Colonialism

Born in the 'twenties of the present century in Recife, Brazil -- the centre of one of the most underdeveloped regions of the Third World, he had undergone the experience of reality of dependency and alienation. The formative period of his life was long and arduous and filled with uncertainty, victimisation and even imprisonment. He came from a peasant family, which was stationed in the proverbially backward drought-hit Nordeste region of Brazil. When the depression of 1929 hit Recife, it hit the Freires too, rather badly. And young Paulo, went hungry for the first time when he was hardly ten years old. The experience of sharing poverty with Pernambuco peasants made a deep impression on him. He had fallen behind in school because of the listlessness produced by prolonged hunger, and

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14. Paulo Freire, Education For Liberation (Bangalore, 1975), p. 29.

this made it almost impossible to study. This poverty had a great influence on Freire, and at eleven he decided that if he lived, he would commit himself to remove the conditions that cause people to go hungry. This was not a simple childhood dream.

Being Northeast-born, Freire faced all the problems of colonisation. His early sharing of the life of the poor led him to the discovery of what he calls the 'culture of silence', of the dispossessed. He soon realised that this whole type of submission and complete listlessness amongst these people was the direct product of the whole situation which included economic, social and political domination. The people of Brazil were the direct victims of these forces -- the main force being colonisation.

As early as 1947, Freire was seriously interested in the adult literacy education of Pernambuco's poor. He pursued graduate studies in history and the philosophy of education at the University of Pernambuco, Recife. Soon he was appointed as Professor of Education at the same University. While holding his academic position, he continued working and experimenting in adult literacy education until he was imprisoned in 1964, following the military coup in Brazil.

Being a professor of Pedagogy, he was familiar with the standard methods but he was disillusioned with them. "The language and situations common in the primers were drawn from urban middle class life and bore little, if any, relationship

to the problems and interests of the lower classes, chiefly rural, that he was trying to teach".<sup>15</sup> He soon realised that education so far had aimed at adapting pupils to a society that he, like other critical Brazilians, believed should change.

While undergoing the prison term of about seventy days, Brazil's authoritarian military junta stripped Freire of his citizenship and sentenced him to exile. Freire took his wife and five children to Santiago, Chile, where he worked as a UNESCO consultant and with Santiago's Agrarian Reform Training and Research Institute.

While in prison his ideas on adult education began to crystallise. He began writing a little book that described his methodology for adult literacy education -- a work he completed later in Santiago. Since then he has written some books and articles refining and perfecting his ideas on adult literacy programme. The most important of his works are Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Cultural Action for Freedom and Education for Critical Consciousness. During the time of his writings Freire says:

I experienced myself in this process and was challenged by the concrete situation of the people. I tried to give my contribution as an educator to this process of the liberation of the people. At that time I had a lot of naivete. I was studying the historical and cultural evolution of my country.<sup>16</sup>

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15. Thomas G. Sanders, "Literacy Training and Conscientisation", in American Universities Field Staff Report, (Chile), Vol. 15, no.1, p. 3.

16. Freire, n.13, p. 29.

Freire clearly saw the relation between theory and social reality. Hence his vocational commitment was a political one. He realised that language and ideas are inextricably linked, that language is always accompanied by an ideology and is therefore class-based. It was, thus, through his politics that Freire derived his method.

In this context, Freire's objective was to offer an education which would help the oppressed to overcome their silence. Paulo Freire's method and ideas derived from the following: (i) the language, culture and problems of the illiterates themselves; (ii) philosophies of knowledge, human nature, culture and history; (iii) analytical studies of under-development in recently emerged Third World countries.

In the words of Richard Shaull in his Foreword to Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

From a situation of direct engagement in the struggle to liberate man and women for the creation of a new world, Paulo has reached out to the thought and experience of those in many different situations and of diverse philosophical positions: in his words to 'Sartre and Mounier, Eric Fromm and Louis Althusser Ortega y Gasset and Mao, Martin Luther King and Che Guevara, Unamuno and Marcuse'. He has made use of the insights of these men to develop a perspective on education which is authentically his own and which seeks to respond to the concrete realities of Latin America.<sup>17</sup>

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17. Richard Shaull, Foreword to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, n.5, p. 10.

The period of 1960 to 1963 saw the concretisation of Freire's ideas about the problems of his people. The main catalyst was his participation in the movement of Popular Culture in Recife, where such themes as "nationalism, remission of profits, development and illiteracy were discussed in groups using visual aids to schematise the issues".<sup>18</sup> He found the exercise very rewarding as it seemed to awaken the consciousness of the participants. Freire began to apply similar methods to literacy training.

Admittedly, his objective was to evolve a unique method of educating the masses; one that would inculcate in them a measure of self-confidence, that would in turn 'liberate' them. He ascribed a novel connotation to the word "education". To Freire, education is "conscientisation" (conscientizacao). It is a process of making people aware of what he calls "the true reality". It is the awakening of the people's consciousness in order to analyse the causes and effects of their own situation, so that they may not only take control of the situation but transform it.

Freire understood the conscientisation process to be the setting up of a "critical education". This was understood as "an education which was oriented toward the decision and practice of social and political responsibility".<sup>19</sup> It was a

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18. Sanders, n.15, p. 5.

19. Freire, IJAC Document No.8, (Geneva, 1975), p. 22.



question of helping the Brazilian people to discover democracy by participating in it, which implied moving beyond a "naive consciousness" to reach a "critical consciousness".<sup>20</sup> Under Freire's direction, in the national Literacy Program for Adults, the ideas of liberty, democracy and critical consciousness are at the heart of the educational process.

In many respects Freire's concept of conscientizacao is truly revolutionary, for it is a totally new alternative to traditional education; change, learning and experience taking on simultaneous and equal roles. Once critical consciousness is created in man, he will begin to act logically and reflectively and thereby transform reality. In other words, reflection-in-action, or what Freire calls praxis, is essential to the educational process.

To Freire, the belief that schools shape society is an absurdity. For him, it is the other way round; and the act of knowing is something that a man does for himself. True liberation can only be achieved by an education that makes man rational in outlook. Real and radical transformation of property relations must precede the institutionalisation of liberating educational modes.

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20. "Naive Consciousness" is that of a person who is submitted to social change without understanding the real causes of them, and who grasps only the most immediate and external causes of the social change phenomena.

Another important feature of Freire's method was his attempt to provide an alternative to the usual teaching habits. He believed implicitly that education could not be neutral. It either liberates man from the chains of subjugation or domesticates him within it. Freire's method of teaching involved an entirely new value concept. He felt that words should have an emotional content comprehensible to the pupil.

The idea of having an a, b, c book for the whole country has no scientific basis. We took seriously the pragmatic level of language. We had to choose words which offered clues to linguistic difficulties. Each word had to be connected to the reality of the people. For each word we needed codification.<sup>21</sup>

The vocabulary was chosen not only for their representation of the basic sounds of the language, but also for their potential capacity to confront the social, cultural and political reality. In this context, Freire developed a meaningful vocabulary for different contexts. For instance, for the rural illiterates, words such as shovel, yoke, work, people, radio, etc., were chosen; whereas for the city-dwelling masses, such words as slum, bicycle, salary, brick, government, etc., were chosen.

In most primers used in traditional adult literacy campaigns, text sentences read as follows: "Eva saw the grape"; "the cock crows"; "the dog barks"; "Mary likes animals"; and

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21. Freire, n.13, p. 31.

other similar inanities. According to Freire, these are no doubt relevant in their "linguistic contexts"; but they are "deprived of their authentic dimensions as thought-language in dynamic interplay with reality. Thus impoverished, they are not authentic expressions of the world."<sup>22</sup>

The key to the successful implementation of the method is the 'co-ordinator'. His role was not to teach but to get all the members of the group to participate by directing questions to them and prolonging the discussion so that they may realise the deeper meaning of what was once for them an obvious and accepted reality. From the beginning these groups, which were called 'culture circles', avoided purely mechanical approaches to literacy. Their main aim was to raise the level of consciousness in accordance with the phenomenon of emergence that was happening in their country. The main task thus was to raise the level of consciousness from naivete to critical intelligence accompanied with illiteracy to literacy. In other words, it stimulates the participants to move themselves by a realistic assessment of themselves and their environment, from unauthentic interpretations of life to creative initiative.

Describing his experience in Recife's Cultural Extension Service, Freire gives verbatim accounts of the responses of those who underwent training: "I came only to learn how to sign my name. I never believed I would be able to read too,

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22. Freire, n .10, p. 26.

at my age", says one. "Before letters seemed like puppets. Today they say something to me, and I can make them talk", quips another. "I want to learn how to read and write", said one man, "so I can get out from under the shadow of others". Another man, exemplifying the process of populist emergence that is characteristic of Brazilian transition, said: "The people have the answers". "The world is my school", observed a peasant profoundly.<sup>23</sup>

The Paulo Freire method gained prominence after 1962 when Brazil, encouraged by the example of Cuba which had almost eliminated illiteracy through a massive campaign, was the scene of a movement by both private and public agencies eager to accomplish the same result. In 1963, the Brazilian Ministry of Education committed itself to a literacy campaign using Freire's method. Training courses for coordinators were begun in nearly all the states -- 6000 persons volunteering in Guanabara alone. It was anticipated that by 1964, 20,000 'circles of culture' would be under way, teaching and 'conscientising' two million people in a course lasting three months. Forty million Brazilians would thus become literate within a few years.

The revolutionary implications of the method were freely discussed and accepted since those who were involved in it were of the opinion that the country was in a pre-revolutionary situation. Freire's method was however, looked upon apprehensively by the upper and middle classes. They believed that it would lead to the proletarianisation of society

23. ICIRA, 1968 Annual Report - Agrarian Reform Training and Research Institute, (Chile, 1969), pp.279-80.

and a shift in power towards the illiterates and semi-illiterates. There was considerable anti-Freire propaganda, particularly from the influential Rio de Janeiro daily, O Globo. Its main charge was that his method was an instrument of subversion. The fundamental fear of the ruling classes was one of the causes for the governmental change of 1964, which delivered the coup de grace to the conscientisation programme.<sup>24</sup>

Thereupon Freire left Brazil and lived in Chile, working for the Chilean government. He worked for three years in an educational project related to the Agrarian Reform Programme, directed by Jacques Chonchol, who later became Minister of Agriculture in the Allende Government. In 1967, Freire was invited to Harvard, and for the first time he left familiar Latin America and made his first contact with the industrialised world. In the United States of America he was immediately confronted with two revelations: first, misery and oppression -- especially of the blacks -- in the midst of material prosperity; and secondly, the alienation and domestication of large sections of the American public.

Freire soon realised that the Third World was not merely a geographical concept. "The blacks and other racial minorities offered a very visible example of the 'Third World'

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24. Since 1964, literacy training has been continued in Brazil on a modest scale, but, significantly, without 'conscientisation'.

in the United States, in the same manner as the ruling classes in Brazil and in Chile who played the role of the 'First World' against the worker and peasant population in their respective countries."<sup>25</sup> After this direct contact with the developed countries, Freire's ideas about democracy underwent drastic change.

In 1970, Freire moved to Switzerland to take up work as a consultant in the Department of Education of the World Council of Churches. This assignment helped him to maintain contact with radical educational programmes in Tanzania, in Allende's Chile, and with Liberation Movements in Portuguese colonies. He also participated in 1971, in the founding of the Institute of Cultural Action, the goal of which was to work at translating the theory and practice of conscientisation into the socio-cultural context of the "highly industrialised societies."

In later writings (after the 1964 coup) Freire realised that his experience was not without its weaknesses. In his attempt to clarify himself, Freire redefined the very notions of 'democracy', 'liberty' and 'participation'. Another clarification Freire made, was to make elaborate his theory of change.

From the preceding account of Paulo Freire's life, ideas and pedagogical method it is observed that Freire's concern is, most importantly, political in nature. It cannot

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25. Freire, n. 10, p. 25.

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be overemphasized that he is more than a mere pedagogue. The objective of his method is quite clear; it is not simply a new alternative to the existing educational system; rather it is intended to be the instrument of social change; in the sense that Freire wants not merely to teach his students to read and write but to provide a framework in which they may comprehend the realities of their own existence in a critical and rational manner.

Freire's understanding of social change is conditioned by the historical experience of Latin America in general and Brazil, in particular. His aim was to break the shackles of colonisation which had been clamped on his people both physically and mentally.

Freire has been influenced to a considerable extent by his Catholic background. Perhaps this would explain Freire's lukewarm attitude towards the classical Marxist pattern of social change. However, Freire sees no basic contradiction in being Catholic and Marxist at the same time. Here it could be mentioned that Freire's decision to live and work with the World Council of Churches, at Geneva, so far away from home and his people, adds another dimension to his ideological leanings.

To give Freire his due, it cannot be denied that his concern for his people is genuine; it arose from his own personal experience beginning from childhood. The deprivations of his

family and the poverty and oppression all around him influenced his humanistic thinking.

Since the concrete historical experience of Brazil, from which Freire derived the core of his thoughts, has been more or less paralleled in all the other recently decolonised countries, it is not surprising that Freire's works contain a message for us all. History has shown that the problems arising out of colonisation and backwardness bear a certain similarity throughout the Third World. Freire's prescription for emergence and awakening is applicable to the colonial people anywhere in the world. The significance of Freire's ideas are as relevant to the First World as they are to the Third, as oppression is not a geographical concept.



**CHAPTER II**

**FREIRE'S CONCEPT OF MAN**

## CHAPTER II

### FREIRE'S CONCEPT OF MAN

When embarking on a study of the political ideas of Paulo Freire, it is necessary, first of all, to have a proper understanding of what Freire means by the word 'man'. Philosophers from time immemorial have focussed their attention on one significant question: what is man? There have been ever so many interpretations about what man really is. For some, man was an incorrigible sinner; for others he sought the good life; for still others, profit. To Freire, 'man' is primarily a political being; and when Freire refers to his "critical man", he is envisaged in a specifically political context. And education is conceived simply as an instrument in the creation of a political man.

Since basically Freire deals with a political man and prescribes political education to his 'man', it is necessary that an attempt should, at the outset, be made to understand the qualities Freire attributes to his man. In his effort to identify man, Freire makes fine distinctions between man and animal and their differing interaction with nature. Also, since culture and history are relevant only in the context of the evolution of man as against animal, it is necessary that some light is shed on Freire's concept of culture and history.

#### Characteristics of Freire's Political Man

For Paulo Freire, man is a critical 'subject'. Freire's characterisation of man is most pronounced when he distinguishes

man from animal. Throughout his writings this differentiation is brought to the fore. It is mainly through this distinction that Freire elucidates and defines man.

Freire sees man as "a being-of-relations" in dialectical relationship with the world and in dialogical relationship with his fellow men. In the same way, Freire sees the relationships existing between man and the world to be dialectical in nature. Man is also a free, conscious, transcendent, temporal being who experiences intentionality or a sense of the consequential.

Man is conceived to be a free being because he alone is able to experience the pluralism that exists in the relationship of man with the world. Each relationship that he experiences with the reality is a challenge, something to which he has to bring his own, original response. In this context, Freire says:

There is a pluralism in the relationships of man with the world in so far as he responds to the rich variety of challenges from the world. Thus he need not, therefore, confine himself to one rigid kind of response. His pluralism is rooted not only in different challenges but in the diversity of responses to the same challenge. In the on-going process of his responses he changes in the very act of responding; he organizes himself and chooses the best response. He tests it and acts upon it. In the relationships which man structures with the world, there exists, due to man himself, a pluralism within the singularity of his relationship with the world.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Paulo Freire, (Tr.) La Education como Pratica de la Libertad, ICIRA (Santiago, Chile, 1969), p. 40.

Freire has a great deal to say about human consciousness, and his theory of consciousness and its levels is at the very heart of his educational philosophy. But in his concept of man an essential quality is human criticalness, a function of consciousness. Freire puts it this way:

In gathering the objective data from his reality, as threads that unite one datum to the next, one fact to another, man is acting in a critical fashion. He is reflecting. His activity is not merely reflex action, as would be the case in the animal realm of mere contact.<sup>2</sup>

But not only is man, in Freire's view, a free and conscious being; man is "an incomplete being", who experiences "completion" only in his relationships with his creator.

For Freire, religion, which is an expression of the relationship that binds man to God, is the very heart and core of what it means to be a man, to be human. It is interesting to note although Freire implicitly believes in the dialectical method of Karl Marx, he does not however, underplay the role religion plays in human activity. Although, Freire's belief in religion is only implicit in his writings, the importance of it is nevertheless felt. Freire speaks of this quality of transcendence of which man is capable, in the following terms:

Only man is capable of transcendence. Getting himself together -- which he does because he is capable of transcendence -- is not saying that this quality of transcendence is only "spiritual" in the sense that Erich Kahler studied human transcendence. Nor is it exclusively a result of the transitive quality of man's consciousness, which permits him to

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2. Ibid.

objectify himself and to objectify that objectification so that he then recognizes different existential realms and thereby distinguishes a "self" from a "non-self". For us, man's transcendence is equally at the root his finiteness and in the consciousness man has of his own finiteness. For, man is an incomplete being, and the completion of his incompleteness is encountered in his relationship with his creator, a relationship which by its very nature, can never be a relationship of domination or domestication, but is always a relationship of liberation. Thus, religion ("religare") which incarnates this transcendent sense of relationships among men should never be an instrument of alienation. Precisely because he is a finite and indigent being, in this transcendence through love, man has his return to his source, who liberates him.<sup>3</sup>

Freire sees no contradiction between his faith and his commitment. He admits that it is not necessary to be a Christian, to be a revolutionary; but to be a Christian is to be committed to the cause of the revolution. In his words:

If I am asked in which country, USA or China, one can be more authentically Christian, though I do not know China first hand I have no hesitation in answering, China. I believe that in a capitalist country it is very difficult for a Christian to live. Does not God appear in a society which says he does not exist? God is expressing himself in China, in Cuba. We tend to think that the only expression of God is in the Church. For me the big temple of God is the World. Church is only a big house. Incarnation proclaims that Christ is with man everywhere.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Ibid.

4. Paulo Freire, Education for Liberation, (Bangalore, 1975), pp. 40-41.

In this respect, Freire reflects the position taken by the radical priests of Latin America such as Camilo Torres of Columbia and Helder Camara of Brazil who have given a revolutionary interpretation to the Bible and maintained the position that to be a Christian is to be a revolutionary.<sup>5</sup>

The fourth quality contained in Freire's concept of man is what he calls "the quality of temporality". Freire views time as the creation of man. If man differs from beasts it is not only because man can reflect and also reflect on his own act of reflection, which animals cannot do, but it is also because man is not a prisoner of the static present as animals are. For Freire, man can "temporalize" himself, and by so doing, he becomes his own subject. He inserts himself into human history as author not as object.<sup>6</sup>

In the act of insight (because man exists and does not merely live) there is found the root of the discovery of his own temporality. He begins to experience this temporality at the moment of breaking through unidimensionally-experienced time. At this moment he rises above his past, he scrutinizes the present and he constructs his future. One of his first insights, then, within the historical context of his own culture, is the unidimensionality of time. The "excess" of time under which man lived in preliterate cultures thwarted his own understanding of his own temporality, which he attains with the insight referred to previously, and which gives him access to his own historicity. As animal has no historicity because of his inability to emerge from or rise above

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5. See works of Camilo Torres, Por el Padre Camillo Torres nestrepto (Mexico, 1967) and Helder Camara, Revolution Through Peace (New York, 1971).

6. Freire, n,4, pp.40-41.

time, to gain insight, to transcend that which keeps him submerged in a totally unidimensional time -- a static present of which he has no consciousness. Man, on the other hand, exists ("existere") in time. He is "within". He is "without". He possesses. He incorporates. He modifies. Because he is not a prisoner of time reduced to a permanent present, he emerges from it. He immerses himself in it. He temporalizes himself.<sup>7</sup>

Were man an "atemporal" being, as animals are, he would live outside of history and culture. He would be "ahistorical" and "acultural" as well as "atemporal". But because man creates time as an act of consciousness, he is also capable of creating history and culture. This capacity to create history and culture is due to man's intentionality, or what Freire calls man's "sense of the consequential".<sup>8</sup>

In so far as he achieves this emergence from time, freeing himself from its unidimensionality, understanding it, his relationships with the world are permeated with a sense of the consequential. It is almost commonplace to affirm that the natural position of man in the world is to be not only in it, but with it; for he is not restricted to mere passivity. By not reducing himself to only one of these dimensions in which he shares -- the natural and cultural -- the first by his biological character, the second by his creative power, man can be preeminently one who transforms. His capacity for non-distorted and not merely accidental intervention does not permit him to be a mere spectator incapable of intervening in the reality in order to modify it. Possessing an acquired experience, creating and re-creating, integrating himself and his experience with the conditions of his context, responding to the challenges of his situation, objectifying them and himself, gaining insight,

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7. Freire, n.1, p.42.

8. Ibid.

transcending, man engages in a realm that is his alone, that of history and culture.<sup>9</sup>

For Freire then, because man is temporal and thereby experiences a sense of the consequential, because man has great capacities for freedom and for a developed critical consciousness, and finally, because man is capable of transcendence, the only authentic model after which man should fashion himself is what Freire would call "the radical man" -- an ideal type.

Radicalization, which is implied when man chooses for himself, is positive because it is preponderantly critical. Because it is critical and loving, it is also humble and communicative.

In his choosing, radical man does not deny to the other the right to choose as well. He does not wish to impose his views. He dialogues about it. He is convinced about his own choice but he also respects the right of the other to be convinced about his own choice as well. He tries to convince and convert, but without in any way coercing his opponent.

Nevertheless, he does have the responsibility, because of love, to resist the violence of those who try to impose silence, those who, in the name of freedom, kill that very freedom both in themselves and in others.

The radical position, which is a loving position, cannot be masochistic. Radical man cannot be passively satisfied with the exacerbated power of the few which brings with it the dehumanization of all, including the powerful.

Radical man always submits his action to critical thought .... Radical man is no mere spectator of the historical process. Rather, he is a subject, and as such, he seizes upon the contradictions of history. But he does not see himself as the sole

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9. Ibid., p. 43.



proprietor of history. He recognizes that if he can neither anticipate nor stop history, he must together with other subjects, collaborate to hasten the transformation of his situation. And his effectiveness in this regard is in proportion to the development of his critical consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

### Concept of Nature

There is no single place in his written work where Freire explicitly discusses nature. On the other hand, a concept of nature is always implicit in the discussion whenever he invokes the seemingly trite but actually crucial distinction between man and animal.<sup>11</sup>

Because man reflects, not only does he know, but he knows that he knows. For Freire, man's "consciousness is impossible without the world which constitutes it ... [and] it is equally true that this world is impossible if the world itself in constituting consciousness does not become an object of its critical reflection."<sup>12</sup> Man creates himself and becomes

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10. Ibid., pp.50-51.

11. Marx also, in his analysis of man, contrasts man with animal. In the Philosophical Manuscripts, Marx defines the species character of human beings 'as free conscious activity', in contrast to the nature of the animal which does not distinguish the activity from itself.

12. Paulo Freire, "Cultural Action and Conscientization", Harvard Educational Review, (New York), Vol.40, No.3, p. 454.

subject to the extent to which he is integrated with his specific context and reflects upon it. Thus, in Freire's view, man's consciousness originates in the "dialectic of man's objectification of, and action upon, the world."<sup>13</sup>

Man as a being-of-relations, whose proper "vocation" is to be a "subject", becomes a subject, or "humanizes" himself only within the context of his relationship with the physical world.

Man, simply because he is a man, is capable of realizing that there are other realities exterior to himself. He observes "that he and other beings exist in the same world and that they are in different existential orbits; a world of inanimate objects, plants and animals and other human beings. He has the power of realizing that he is not living in an everlasting present, but the time-dimension he lives in is made up of yesterday, today and tomorrow."<sup>14</sup> Freire believes that consciousness of, and action upon, reality are therefore inseparable constituents of the transforming act by which man becomes a "being-of-relations".

Moreover, because man is a conscious, rational being, man is praxis.<sup>15</sup> That is, man's conscious and intentional

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13. This idea is not only dear to the Marxists, but to Durkheimians as well.

14. Freire, n.12, pp.453-454.

15. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (London, 1975), p. 60.

action has an impact on the physical world. The fact that man is so affected is due to the inversion of praxis by which culture is created or introjected into the conscious agent. This introjection modifies man's subsequent active impacts on the physical world. And the process, or dialectic, continues.

An animal, on the other hand, is a reflexive rather than reflective being. Because the animal is not a self-conscious being, it is incapable of reflecting on its own activity. The things produced by its own activity, are of itself. Thus because an animal is incapable of separating itself from its activity, its activity is simply an extension of its own being.

Because the animals' activity is an extension of themselves, the results of that activity are also inseparable from themselves; animals can neither set objectives nor infuse their transformation of nature with any significance beyond itself. Moreover, the "decision" to perform this activity belongs not to them but to their species. Animals are, accordingly, "beings-in-themselves".<sup>16</sup>

Being reflexive rather than reflective, animals are atemporal. Because atemporal, animals are also both "ahistorical" and "acultural", for to be an historical and cultural being presupposes the note of temporality. Animals do not go through experience. Animals do not elaborate goals; they exist at the level of immersion and thus are atemporal. But with animals (in contrast to man), Freire writes:

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16. Ibid., p. 70.

As it lives immersed in a world to which it cannot give meaning, as it has no yesterday, today or tomorrow, and lives in an oppressive present, the animal is not a historical being. His ahistorical life is lived in a world which is not a "non-self" which might change him into a self and in this way, allow him to be conscious of himself and of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Because animals are not reflective but only reflexive beings they are only 'in' but not 'with' the world. For "the animal's, contacts are acritical. They do not go beyond the association of sensory images through experience. They are singular and not plural. Animals do not elaborate goals; they exist at the level of immersion."<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, if it can be said that man, because he is a being-of-relations, is praxis, in contrast to animal, animals are mere creatures of contact. As Freire says:

Contacts are the mode of being proper to the animal realm. Contacts imply the very opposite of human relationships. They imply predetermined or reflex reactions rather than thoughtful and culturally consequential responses. Thus, contacts result in accommodations, not in integration.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, if integration characterises the orientation of man to the physical world, adaptation or accommodation

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17. Ibid.

18. Paulo Freire, Cultural Action For Freedom, (London, 1975), p. 52.

19. Freire, n.1, pp.4-5.

characterises the orientation of animal to the physical world. "Whereas animals adapt themselves to the world to survive, men modify that world in order to be more."<sup>20</sup> And if man can be at once both in-and-with-the-world, it is because man, being a temporal and therefore, a historical being, has the power of the word which the animals do not have.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the physical world is, for animals, only a "prop"<sup>22</sup> to which they instinctively accommodate or adapt themselves. In Freire's words:

The prop world of animals contains no limit-situations, due to its ahistorical character. Similarly, animals lack the ability to exercise limit-acts, which require a decisive attitude towards the world: separation from and objectification of the world in order to transform it. Organically bound to the world, animals do not distinguish between themselves and the world. Accordingly, animals are not limited by the limit-situations -- which are ahistorical -- but rather by the entire prop (in that event, the prop would be the world), but to adapt to it. Thus, when animals "produce" a nest, a hive or a burrow, they are not creating products which result from "limit-acts", that is transforming responses. Their productive activity is subordinated to the satisfaction of a physical necessity which is simply stimulating, rather than challenging.<sup>23</sup>

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20. Freire, n.18, p.55

21. To see Freire's philosophy of the word, refer Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 72. Also refer "Education and Conscientizacao", Ernani Fiori, CICOP Working Paper, 14/C/70, mimeographed, pp.1-5. Fiori was Freire's mentor in philosophy for many years. Freire has expressed his intellectual debt to Fiori.

22. Freire, n.15, pp.70-72.

23. Ibid., p. 72.

For Freire, the ahistorical life of animals does not occur in the "world", taken in the strict sense of the word, because for animals, the world is not a "non-self", which could set the animals apart as a "self". Thus the historical world of man can only be a prop for the animal, a "being-in-itself". Because the animal realm is outside of history, Freire says that animals only "live". They do not "exist". The meaning Freire brings to the term "live" is survival only. So, "live", is the more basic term; and "exist" indicates a conscious, therefore deeper, involvement in the processes of "becoming". Freire points out that in the English language, the terms "live" and "exist" have "assumed implications opposite to their 'etymological origins'". In contrast to animals:

is historical. Animals live out their existence

Men -- aware of their activity and the world in which they are situated, acting in function of the objectives which they propose, having the seat of their decisions located in themselves and in their relations with the world and with others, infusing the world with their creative presence by means of the transformation they effect upon it -- unlike animals, not only live, but exist; and their existence on a atemporal flat, uniform "prop"; men exist in a world which they are constantly re-creating and transforming. For animals, "here" is only a habitat with which they enter into contact; for men, "here" signifies not merely a physical space, but also an historical space.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, because animals are incapable of reflecting on their activity as an extension of themselves, or

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24. Ibid.

on the products of their activity, animals produce for others, not for themselves. Animals produce for men. Thus, animals cannot be said in the strict sense to work. Only men work. Animals cannot work because they are incapable of producing for themselves. They cannot produce for themselves because they are not their own subjects.

There is a further fundamental distinction between man's relationships with the world and the animals' contacts with it; only men work. A horse, for example, lacks what is proper to man, what Marx refers to in his example of the bees: "At the end of the every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement".... Action without this dimension is not work. In the fields as well as in the circus, the apparent work of horses reflects the work of men. Action is not work because of the greater or lesser physical effort expended in it by the acting organism, but because of the consciousness the subject has of his own effort, the possibility of programming action, of creating tools and using them to mediate between himself and the object of his action, of having purposes, of anticipating results. Still more, for action to be work, it must result in significant products, which while distinct from the active agent, at the same time condition him and become the object of his reflection.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, animals are not risk-takers because they are not challenged by their environments. Their environment does not evoke from them decisive responses.<sup>26</sup> Thus unlike man

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25. Freire, n.12, pp.456-457.

26. Skinnerians and other behaviouralists could raise serious philosophical objections to Freire's distinction between man and animal. Freire could also be accused of having tried Thomism. But our purpose here is simply to present Freire's core ideas, not to treat them critically.

animals cannot commit themselves. Their ahistorical condition does not permit them to "take on" life. Because they do not "take it on", they cannot construct it; and if they do not construct it, they cannot transform its configuration. Nor can they know themselves to be destroyed by life, for they cannot expand their "prop" world into a meaningful, symbolic world which includes culture and history. As a result, animals do not "animalize" themselves -- nor do they "de-animalize" themselves. Even in the forest, they remain "beings-in-themselves", as animal-like there as in the zoo.<sup>27</sup>

And finally, because a man is a man and is capable of discernment, he is capable of developing relationships with other human beings.. This, too is specifically characteristic of human beings, in contrast to animals. An animal can be in contact with reality. The difference being that a relationship implies the use of intelligence, critical judgement, technical skill, etc. In other words, it implies a behaviour which cannot be determined only by reflexes, and which is peculiar to man as a free, and intelligent being.

Freire, says that in course of this network of relations, man becomes a subject. When man uses his power of discernment he finds himself face to face with reality which is not only exterior to himself, but which stands up to him, defies and provokes him. Man's relationship with reality, with his own context in life, is one of confrontations and oppositions. Nature opposes man, and a man's relations with

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27. Freire, n.15, pp.70-71.



other men are relations of opposition and confrontations in the sense that he is continually faced with the temptation to use them as objects, for his own benefit.

Freire writes, "each relationship, therefore, with reality is a challenge, something to which he has to bring his own original response. There are no set patterns of response, but a different one for every occasion."<sup>28</sup> What is important to understand is that man's response to a challenge not only changes the reality but changes man a little more with each new challenge. In the repeated play of challenges and responses, man changes himself by the fact that he responds. Freire continues:

His responses to the challenges of his life context is the act by which man creates himself, also the act by which he becomes subject, for this response demands reflection, critical inventiveness, choice, decisions, organizations, actions. This is how he becomes not only 'adjusted' to the reality and other persons but integrated.<sup>29</sup>

Through this method of meeting challenges throughout life, man is also invited into a dialogue with his fellows, which is characterized by fellowship and reciprocity.

It follows that once man is integrated into his life context, he starts reflecting on it and responds to its challenges, and in the process creates his own culture.

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28. Literacy Awareness and Education, IDAC Study Document, Nojrac, pp.7-8.

29. Ibid., p.8.

Culture is one of the major differences that exist between man and animal. As man makes relations with the world, he creates and re-creates. In the process of interaction he gives something of himself to it. In this way he creates culture.

For Paulo Freire, the word culture has a much deeper content than the way people usually view this phenomenon. Culture is markedly distinct from nature, which is not a product of man; and culture which is made and transformed and added to the existing culture is what he adds to nature. "It is the fruit of all human labour, of man's creative and re-creative work, of his efforts to transform reality and form relationships of exchange and dialogue with other men."<sup>30</sup> Culture is seen "as the sum of systematically acquired knowledge of man's experience which is got through a critical and creative acquisition, through the process of dialogue, and not something which is just transmitted with no integration into the whole being and life of man."<sup>31</sup>

In this sense one can say that man cultivates himself and creates culture by the very fact that he forms relationships, answers the challenges of nature, criticises and incorporates into himself the accumulated human experience gained by his ancestors and those around him and expresses it in creative action.

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30. Ibid., p. 9.

31. Ibid.

From this it naturally follows that man is not only the creator of his culture by his responses to the challenge of nature and the relations he forms, but he also makes history. To the extent to which man creates, re-creates and decides, the ages are formed and re-formed. Freire says:

History -- in the fullest sense of the word is the history of all the people, not just of the armies or the governments of a country -- is simply the successive responses that generations of men give to the challenge of nature, other men and social structures. <sup>32</sup>

In contrast, the animals are "unable to objectify either themselves or their activity, lacking objectives which they themselves have set, living "submerged" in a world to which they can give no meaning, lacking a 'tomorrow' and a 'today' because they exist in an over-whelming present -- animals are ahistorical."<sup>33</sup>

As a result of this, animals are not able to commit themselves. Their ahistorical condition prevents them from taking on life. On the other hand, man is seen as a conscious being, who "exists in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and his own freedom."<sup>34</sup>

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32. Ibid.

33. Freire, n.15, pp.70-73.

34. Ibid., p. 71.

According to Freire: "Men can tri-dimensionalize time into the past, the present and the future. Their history, in functions of their own creations, develop as a constant process of transformation within which epochal units materialize."<sup>35</sup>

Freire conceives any epoch to have a complex of ideas, hopes, doubts, concepts, values, and challenges in a dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards fulfilment. The concrete representations of these ideas, form the theme of each epoch. Freire's man, is one who is able to work 'dialectically' with these themes, for fulfilment of himself. In other words, the man should be able to judge the existing structure as contradictory to his being and through the process of his being a subject see the universe and his ideas as having some sort of dialectics.

The whole man as seen by Freire can be summed up in 'praxis'. In this process of 'praxis' there are those who look at the themes with the view to maintaining it, and in the process lose its dynamic aspect. In such a situation, myth-creating irrationality itself becomes a fundamental theme. Its opposing theme, the critical and dynamic view of the world strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicization and achieve a full realisation of the human task. The permanent transformation of reality is in favour of the liberation of man.<sup>36</sup>

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35. Ibid., p. 73.

36. Ibid., pp.45-59.

Freire feels that when one studies man, one should adopt "a concept of man as a conscious being, and consciousness as consciousness directed towards the world."<sup>37</sup>

The final distinction Freire makes between man and animal is that animals are ineducable. One cannot pose problems to animals as one can to men. Thus animals are trained. Only men are educable.<sup>38</sup>

A marked similarity is discernible between Freire's concept of man and that of Marx. Freire's whole concept of man seen as a subject and as one who is able to transform nature and to respond to the challenges offered by it, who can form reciprocal relations with other men, and who is able eventually to create his own culture at a particular moment in history through the process of dialectics -- is akin to Marx's concept of man. It is from Marx, it appears that Freire has adopted the dialectical method in order to understand man. It was Marx who in his thinking was able to surpass the mechanical materialist conception of man as a thing among things. Marx surpassed this concept of man by overcoming its naturalism and applying socio-historic criteria. Marx emphasizes in the Economic and Political Manuscripts that if real physical man posits his objective being and powers as alien objects, "the

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37. Ibid., p. 52.

38. Paulo Freire, Informe Anual -- Instituto de Capacitacion en Reforma Agraria (Tr.) (ICIRA) mimeographed, January, 1969, p. 7.

positing is not the subject, it is the subjectivity of the objective powers."<sup>39</sup>

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39. Quoted in Milan Pruscha, "Marxism and the Existential Problems of Man", in Eric Fromm, ed., Socialist Humanism (London, 1965), p. 141.

**CHAPTER III**

**'CULTURE OF SILENCE'**

## CHAPTER III

### 'CULTURE OF SILENCE'

For Freire, culture is the all-enveloping, the all-inclusive concept when it comes to discussion of human affairs. Although Freire frequently uses the term "society" interchangeably with the term "culture", it should be clear that for Freire, the concept of society is subsumed under the concept of culture. Thus, in his discussion of culture he insists that a culture cannot be understood unless the particular social structures of that culture are clearly understood first. Moreover, Freire says that although "culture is the systematic acquisition of human experience", it is "an acquisition that is critically and creatively incorporative, and not merely a juxtaposition of 'given' information or prescriptions." This is, indeed, a humanist view of culture that says "culture is man's contribution to the world of nature, which is not his making." For Freire, culture is the product of human praxis.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Idea of Political Culture

Freire is not a structuralist or mechanist. For Freire, the terms of relationship, as the relationships themselves, are dynamic, always changing realities. They are not static entities. For Freire, the core of culture is political,

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1. Paulo Freire, La Educacion como Practica de la Libertad. (Tr.), (Chile, 1970), p. 99.



and the essence of politics is cultural. It could not be otherwise for anyone who brings the concept of totality to culture. What Freire means by "cultural totality" is that any given culture or society can be viewed as a totality or whole in itself, but to understand any given culture or society it should not only be studied as a totality, but it should first be situated as a "partiality" within the context of a larger cultural totality that includes more than one society. In Freire's view, neither national emergence nor "underdevelopment can be understood without the comprehension of the category of totality."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, for Freire, only by introducing the concept of totality can one speak anthropologically of the cultures of the First, the Second and the Third Worlds.<sup>3</sup> Freire's concept of totality allows him to express his view that not only the societies of the West, but the entire human or global community is, at the present historic moment, undergoing a fundamental transition from one form of world order (or perhaps, organized disorder) to some other, the shape of which is not as yet clear. We are living witnesses, then, to a historic phenomenon of socio-cultural transition on a global scale. In this epoch of transition, man finds himself

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2. Paulo Freire, Adult Education as Cultural Action, (Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, 1969), mimeographed, p. 7.

3. A detailed discussion of what precisely is meant by those terms - First, Second and Third World -- can only be digressionary within the context of this dissertation. Throughout Freire's writing, he uses the term "Third World", and sees himself as a "citizen" of the "Third World", but nowhere does he give any indication. Whatever, that the meaning he brings to the term "Third World" is any different from the concept as explicated by Irving Horowitz, Three Worlds of Development, (New York, 1967).

in the midst of profound cultural crisis. Freire sees the global cultural crisis as dangerous for the emerging Latin American and African nations that for the most part, make up the Third World, lest they become "modernized", which for Freire, is the very antithesis of "development". The crisis of our epoch is an opportunity, in Freire's view, in so far as it presents the peoples of the Third World with the challenge and hope of "development".

But what are the socio-cultural conditions from which these Third World people are emerging? Freire says that, for the most part, the peoples of the Third World, were the "colonized" peoples of the earth and that the characteristics predictable of the colonised societies are five in number. The colonised peoples are <sup>enveloped</sup> in "dependent", "closed", socio-cultural structures in which the people are "beings-for-others". They are objects manipulated by the colonisers. The manipulation by the colonisers have been studied by various writers. Freire describes the coloniser thus:

Apart from direct concrete, material possession of the world, the oppressor consciousness cannot understand itself. The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of men, men themselves; time, everything is reduced to the status of objects of its disposal.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas Albert Memmi has described the coloniser as one whose

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4. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. (London, 1975), p. 34.

living standards are high because those of the colonized are low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labour and servants, it is because the colonized can be exploited by the laws of the colony;... the more freely he breathes, the more the colonised are choked.<sup>5</sup>

Sartre defines the state of the coloniser and in turn the result of the colonised in these words:

The colonizer can only exonerate himself in the systematic pursuit of the 'dehumanization' of the colonized by identifying himself a little more each day with the colonialistic apparatus. Terror and exploitation dehumanize and the exploiter authorises himself with the dehumanisation to carry his exploitation further.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the upshot of it is that the colonised are in a situation of "domestic inexperience", and, therefore, enveloped in a "culture of silence".

Freire explains what he means by "dependent" societies in terms of what he calls "structures of domination".

When we recognize the existence of a structure of domination, we are obliged to recognize also the existence of two poles in antagonistic relations. Both of them, in the very concrete reality of domination, constitute themselves "as two opposed forms or modes of consciousness". The one is independent and its essential structure is to be of itself; the other is dependent and its essence is life and existence for another, the former is the master, or lord, the latter, the "Bondsman".

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5. Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York, 1965), p. 8.

6. Jean Paul Sartre in the Introduction to Albert Memmi's book, The Colonizer and the Colonized, (New York, 1965), p. 8.

As totalities in themselves the closed societies are partialities of a larger totality in which they find themselves in a relationship of dependence towards the manipulating, or central, societies. In this way, in such a relationship of dependence, the closed societies cannot be the "truth of themselves", but on the contrary, find themselves the "truth of the manipulating societies".<sup>7</sup>

The metropolitan society and the dependent society are not totalities in themselves, but are part of a greater whole, the economic, historical, cultural and political contexts in which their mutual relationships evolve. Freire sees the action of the metropolitan society upon the dependent society as directive in character, and the object society's action whether responsive or initiative as a dependent character. Looking at it differently, we have the relationship between the dominator and dominated, which is the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered. The conqueror introjects his ideas and objectives on the conquered, who in turn internalizes these ideas and becomes an ambiguous being 'housing' another. Similarly, the dependent society introjects the values and life style of the metropolitan society, since the structure of the latter shapes the former. Moreover, in Freire's view "dependent ... profiles the Third World".<sup>8</sup>

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7. Paulo Freire, "Adult Education as Cultural Action", pp.2-3. In the quotation given above, Freire is quoting from Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, (New York, 1969), p. 234.
  8. CICOP, Education as Cultural Action, (mimeographed), 3/C/70, p.9.

Freire sees "closed" and "dependent" as two inextricably intertwined qualities predictable of all colonized societies and predictable of the socio-cultural terminus a quo of emergence. In Freire's view, closed societies are

characterised by a rigid hierarchical structure; by the lack of internal markets, since their economy is controlled from the outside; by the exportation of raw materials and importation of manufactured goods, without a voice in either process; by a precarious and selective educational system whose schools are an instrument of maintaining the status quo; by high percentages of illiteracy and disease... by alarming rates of infant mortality, by malnutrition, often with irreparable effects on mental faculties; by a low life expectancy; and by a high rate of crime.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the particular kinds of dialectical relationships that exist between the manipulating or metropolitan society and the dependent societies, as well as within the dominated sectors, the dependent societies "are twice dominated." They are dominated because as beings-for-others they are subject to the elites of their own society and again as members of the dependent society they are directed by the metropolitan society.

Freire, devises his own term to describe the milieu of the socio-cultural dependencies. Freire's term is the "culture of silence". The culture of silence which "overdetermines the infrastructure in which it originates can be understood only

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9. Freire, "Cultural Action and Conscientization", Harvard Educational Review, (New York), Vol.40, No.3, pp.460-1.

△ We do not mean that culture of silence

if it is taken as a totality which is itself part of a greater whole. In this greater whole we must also recognize the culture of cultures which determine the voice of the culture of silence. △ is an entity created by the metropolis in specialized laboratories and transported to the Third World. Neither is it true, however, that the culture of silence emerges by spontaneous generation. The fact is that the culture of silence is born in the relationship between the Third World and the metropolis. "It is not the dominator who constructs a culture and imposes it on the dominated. This culture is a result of the structural relations between the dominated and the dominators." Thus, understanding the culture of silence presupposes an analysis of dependence as a relational phenomenon which gives rise to different forms of being, of thinking, of expression, those of the culture of silence and those of the culture "which has a voice."<sup>10</sup>

Freire maintains that the culture of silence is characterised as one in which the power elites exercise the right of decision-making, of acting, without the participation of the popular majority. Furthermore, because the economic decision-making circle is outside the culture of silence, and located in the metropolitan culture, the infrastructure of the culture of silence is moulded by the metropolitan elites. Because of the fundamental inauthenticity of economic relations imposed on a people from without, the superstructural culture of silence that emerges "reflects the inauthenticity of the infrastructure."

Whereas the metropolis can absorb its ideological crises through mechanisms of economic power and a highly developed technology, the dependent structure is too weak to support the slightest

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10. Ibid., pp.458-9.

popular manifestation. This accounts for the frequent rigidity of the dependent structure.

The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis -- in every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens.

The silence of the object society in relation to the director society is repeated in the relationships within the object society itself. Its power elites, silent in the face of the metropolis, silence their own people in turn. Only when the people of a dependent society break out of the culture of silence and with their right to speak -- only, that is, when radical structural changes transform the dependent society -- can such a society as a whole cease to be silent towards the director society.<sup>11</sup>

Freire frequently uses a theological concept as a foil to clarify the culture of silence. The conceptual foil is the concept of word. For Freire, the articulated word that expresses the invisible man-world unity is also what unifies human reflection and action. Thus, "word", because it unifies reflection and action, is working and, hence, praxis; because word is praxis, to speak a true word is to transform the world.

Freire calls the inauthentic articulation of the word as "verbalism".

When we overexpress reflection, while neglecting action, we are sacrificing the true reflection (in fact, we are not expressing it) and so, instead of the real word, we will have bla, bla, bla, or a mere verbalism.

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11. Ibid.

Similarly, when we overexpress action with a neglect for reflection, we are sacrificing the true action (in fact, we are not exercising it), and so instead of the real word, we will have mere activism. This is because neither verbalism nor activism can constitute true human praxis by which men become transformed beings.

This also means the real impossibility of theory without practice and vice versa, as well as discussing facts without looking for their causes. It is necessary to avoid the naive, but unfortunately generalized identification between theory and bla, bla, bla and the not less naive scorn for philosophy which is not always a game of empty words.

If "saying the true word" implies transforming the world, in whose practice men become men, that is, men affirm themselves as being of the constant creation and recreation of the world, executing such an act implies also becoming subject and not object. Because of this "saying the word" is not properly to say "Good morning! How do you do?" but to participate, to create, to decide, to be free. So, exercising such an act only through which it is possible for men to become men, cannot be a privilege of some men, or some social classes, or some nations, but the primordial right of all men. Obviously, such a conclusion cannot be accepted by the reactionary elites, who consider themselves, naturally, as "superior beings", whose task it is to adapt the "inferior beings" to their finalities.... The culture of silence, therefore, is characterized as one in which only the elites of power exercise the right of choosing, of acting, of commanding, without the participation of the popular majority. So, the right of saying the word is exclusively theirs.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of the culture of silence is pivotal in the thinking and action of Freire, the political exile, who insists that, not just for Brazil, but for global society, the fundamental cultural theme of our epoch is domination, which presents its

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12. Freire, n.4, pp.60-61.



opposite, the theme of liberation as the goal to be achieved.<sup>13</sup>

As the structures of domination "crack" and the masses of the Third World "begin to emerge from their silence", it is because the peoples of the Third World have begun to discover their own socio-cultural situation of dependency.

Because of this, emerging must be understood as the announcing moment which is the mediation between the former historical situation of the silent immersion in such a world and its viable projects, which are being generated in the very act of emerging.

The mediating nature of emerging is as obvious as its mediating character. Emerging would be impossible if the being ... emerging were not previously immersed or semi-immersed. But, on the other hand, emerging would be impossible also if there did not exist another being, in a contrary state, to testify to the emerging of the other.

In such a way, the Third World is emerging, not from itself, but from a totality in which it is a partiality in process of awareness. In its emerging, the more it comes back upon itself, the more it discovers itself as a dependent world in a dialectical relationship with the manipulating world. In such a discovery it is possible to perceive the dramatic meaning of emerging which is a "limit-situation" for both of these worlds -- the Third and the First.

As a total phenomenon, emerging is, on the other hand, the emerging of the Third World from the totality in which it takes part and, on the other hand, the emerging of its upprivileged sectors.

In this way, in the last analysis, the contradictions of emerging are seen not only between the elitist structures of power and the people emerging, but also between the attempts of emancipation of the Third World and the interests of the First World.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Freire, n.4, p. 93.

14. Freire, n.2, pp.20-21.

Freire has elaborated upon some more methods that keep the natives in their oppressed conditions -- the divide and rule policy, manipulation, and finally cultural invasion.

In the divide and rule policy, concepts such as unity, organisation and struggle, are immediately labelled as dangerous. In their community development projects what they usually do is to break down these communities into local communities, and in turn, in their own totality they get alienated from the larger section of the population. And the more alienated the people get, the easier it is to divide them and keep them divided. "These focalised forms of action, by intensifying the focalised way of life of the oppressed (especially in rural areas), hamper the oppressed from perceiving reality critically and keep them isolated from the problems of oppressed men in other areas."<sup>15</sup>

The main aim is to keep the oppressed apart, and, as long as the oppressed do not realise their state of depersonalisation, they are easy prey for manipulation and domination, and therefore, cannot overthrow the dominators. Unity and organisation can enable them to change their weakness into a transforming force with which they can recreate the world, making it more human.<sup>16</sup> As it is initially important to maintain the

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15. Freire, n.4, p.111.

16. For this reason it is very important for the oppressor to keep the peasants isolated from the urban workers, just as it is indispensable to keep both groups isolated from the students. The testimony of rebellion of the latter (although they do not sociologically constitute a class) makes them dangerous should they join the people.

status quo, it is essential for the oppressors to keep the oppressed from perceiving their strategy.

Another dimension of the theory of anti-dialogical action, and like the strategy of division and manipulation is used extensively by the dominant elites to make the masses conform to their objectives.

The elite have clear cut ways of fooling the masses to believe that their ideals and objectives are for the good of the masses. They have pacts, which if considered on a superficial basis seems to be like having a dialogue between the classes. Eventually, pacts are used by the dominators to achieve their own ends. For example, the support given by the people to the so called 'national capitalism', these pacts, are put into force only when "the people begin (even naively) to emerge from their historical process and by this emerge to threaten the dominant elites."<sup>17</sup> The colonial superstructure has real value only as a refuge. "It saves the colonised from the despair of total defeat and in turn it finds confirmation in a constant inflow of new blood."<sup>18</sup> Thus, the coloniser monopolises all the institutions, and a process of modernization sets in.

"Modernisation" or "Development"

Freire distinguishes sharply between development and the modernization of emergin' countries. Industrialization,

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17. Freire, n.4, p.117.

18. Memmò, n.5, p.99.

urbanization and other aspects of the technological and economic transformation of emerging Third World cultures are modernization, but these same processes are not necessarily cultural development. In Freire's view, in order for a Third World culture to move from progressive under-development to progressive development, it is necessary for the emerging entity in question "to have within its very being, the point of decision of its changes." Unless this fundamental condition is present the emerging nation, society or culture will only be modernized. The economic transformation of Third World infrastructures brought on by technology cannot produce the development of a people if the economic transformation process "has its starting point outside the modernizing societies."<sup>19</sup> For Freire, then, the development of a people, a society, a nation, a culture, implies modernization, but not all modernization is development, even though all authentic Third World cultural development includes modernisation. For Freire, modernization, because it has its origin outside of the modernizing societies, expresses the economic and ideological interests of the manipulating societies. Characteristic of modernization is the cultural invasion of the emerging cultures by the metropolitan culture. By this cultural invasion the metropolitan society can perpetuate the existing international power relationships.

Development is achieved only when the locus of decision for the transformation suffered by a being is found within and not outside him. And this does not happen when dependent

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19. Ibid., p. 2.

societies, which are alienated, and as such are "object societies". When the source of decision-making, including the political, economic and cultural aspects, continue to be outside in the metropolitan society upon which they depend, only a modernization process is achieved. For this reason, the historical-sociological transition of Latin American societies is channeled into overcoming their dependent conditions and, in this way assume their role as subjects and achieve development; or they will be prevented from discovering their historical destiny.

Obviously, this means much more than the breaking up of an obsolete structure in order to set up a modern one: it means the overcoming of its condition of "being-for-others". The second option can be induced from the outside without involving the people, and ordinarily with the purpose of sooner or later plunging them back into their initial immersion: the first one may only be achieved with the people as the subject of the process.

The option for modernization as against development implies the restriction of cultural freedom as well as the use of methods and of techniques through which the access to culture would apparently be provided .... Modernisation is an objective reply given by the elites in power to the growing grievances expressed by the submerged popular classes.<sup>20</sup>

To him,

Cultural action occurs at the level of superstructure. It can only be understood by what Althusser calls "the dialectic of overdetermination."

This analytic tool prevents us from falling into mechanic explanations. An understanding of it precludes surprise that cultural myths remain after the infrastructure is transformed, even by revolution. When the creation of a new

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20. Paulo Freire, (Tr.) Diagnostico de la Libertad en Latinoamerica, (New York, 1970).

culture is appropriate but impeded by interiorised cultural "residue", this residue, these myths, must be expelled by means of culture. Cultural action and cultural revolution at different stages constitute the modes of this expulsion.<sup>21</sup>

Freire holds that the "dialectic of overdetermination" explains how it is that even though the infrastructure that gave rise to the culture of silence is transformed, the conditioning power of the superstructural culture of silence endures and continues to shape the perception of those enveloped by the culture of silence. The problem then is how to assist the extrojection of the myths that characterize the culture of silence.<sup>22</sup> Freire's solution, as we shall see in Chapter IV, is that of cultural action for freedom, which is what Freire's radical psycho-social andragogy of development purports to be.

If the modernization process is involved, and it is Freire's view that the underlying philosophy of most so called development projects is mechanistic, then not only are the old characteristics of the culture of silence perpetuated, but new myths are created in the process, myths that sustain modernized conditions of vulgar elitism and a level of popular consciousness that is, at best, naive.

The myths that dominate man as cultures of silence undergo modernization are

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21. Freire, "The Adult Literacy Process as Cultural Action for Freedom", Harvard Educational Review, Vol.40, No.2, pp. 216-217.

22. Informe Anual - Instituto de Captiacion e Investigacion en Reforma Agraria (ICIRA) (Tr.), Mimeographed, Santiago de Chile, 1969, pp.3-4.

the myth of neutral education, which is a tool for the domestication of men; the myth of "cold scientific objectivity", which transforms dehumanizing structures into inscrutable truths; the myth of the people's intrinsic inferiority and of the consequent, equally intrinsic, superiority of the elites which entitles the latter to manage the former; and the myth which is the extension of the previous one, of the superiority of the nations that are silent because they are silenced.<sup>23</sup>

↳ "speak",  
vis-a-vis  
the inferiority of the nations that

By means of cultural invasion, the modernization partially conceals the truth by making it difficult, if not impossible, for the level of popular consciousness to have a structural perception of the socio-cultural reality enveloping them. Thus modernization leads to a mass society described by Gabriel Marcel.<sup>24</sup>

Massified society does not follow immediately in wake of the first infrastructural changes in the silent societies. Mass society comes much later and presupposes advanced technology.

In order to function, mass societies require technical micro-specialists and in mass societies these specialties become, specialisms, and rationality degenerates into myth-making irrationalism.

Distinct from specialties, to which we are not opposed, specialisms narrow the area of knowledge in such a way that the so-called "specialists"

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23. Freire, n.8, p. 15.

24. Gabriel Marcel, Man Against Mass Society, (New York, 1962).

become generally incapable of thinking. Because they have lost their vision of the whole, of which their specialty is only one dimension, they cannot even think correctly in the area of their specialization. In mass society, ways of thinking become as standardized as ways of dressing and tastes in food. Men begin thinking and acting according to the prescriptions they receive daily from the communications media rather than in response to their dialectical relationships with the world. In mass societies, where everything is prefabricated and behaviour is almost automatized, men are lost because they do not have to "risk themselves"... Technology thus ceases to be perceived by man as one of the greatest expressions of their creative power and becomes instead a species of new divinity to which they create a cult of worship. Efficiency ceases to be identified with the power men have to think, to imagine, to risk themselves in creation, and rather comes to mean carrying out orders from above precisely and punctually.<sup>25</sup>

Freire supports the process of development to the process of modernization, and what he calls "conscientization" to massification. The characteristic elements of the evolving culture in the two different processes are according to Freire as follows:

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25. Freire, n.9, pp.474-475.



"Modernisation"

MASSIFIED societies are characterized by

- Alienation
- Fear of Freedom
- Bureaucracy and gregariousness
- Technology as end
- Communiques
- Antidialogicality
- Dependence
  
- Organized irrationality
  
- Strivings for false security of mechanical womb
  
- Conversations are on the level of isolated subjects
  
- No structural perception of reality
  
- More individualism and anomie

"Development"

HUMANIZED societies are characterized by

- Integration
- Love of freedom
- Authentic common life together
- Technology as means
- Communication
- Dialogicality
- Autonomy and interdependence
  
- Ordered, communalized conscientisation
  
- Strivings for authentic relationships and maintenance of same
  
- Conversations are on the level of generative themes
  
- Structural perception of reality
  
- A common life beyond individualism

Human Evolution in Silent Cultures

Just as Freire talks of "closed", "emerging", "massified", and "open" culture, he has developed corresponding categories of "consciousness and its levels" in his discussions of historical conditioning of human consciousness.

Intransitive consciousness, is characterized by the prevalence of human activity on the strictly biological level. Man is so preoccupied with meeting the most elementary biological needs that he either has no time or takes practically no time to reflect on the present, much less the past. Man, on this level of consciousness is hardly existing, but, for practical purposes, merely living. Man is practically reduced to sheer animality. Freire is quick to add that even on this low level of consciousness "man, whatever his situation may be, is an open being". Man is always more than a beast. The point, however, of Freire's category of pure intransitivity, is to underline the severe "limitation of apprehension" of the most backward men in the culture of silence, and nothing more.<sup>26</sup>

When men in closed or silent cultures have only an intransitive consciousness, they are not only nearly impervious to the problems and challenges beyond the biological sphere, but they are characterized by the near-absence of historical consciousness. Such men are "drowned", as it were, in a time which is experienced as a one-dimensional oppressive present.

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26. Freire, n.1., p. 58.

They do not comprehend the causal relationships that have shaped their socio-cultural situation. Freire is quick to observe that the condition of intransitive consciousness is a pure state and is not actually to be found in specific socio-cultural situations, but one does find a type of popular consciousness that permits the attitudes and views of intransitivity to prevail.

Freire calls this situation one of semi-intransitive, or magical consciousness. As semi-intransitive, or "magical" consciousness is the prevailing consciousness of closed societies, of cultures of silence, ingenious consciousness (semi-transitive naivete) prevails in the emerging societies of the Third World, and it sees itself as superior to the socio-cultural facts. But rather than systematically interpreting them in terms of causal and circumstantial correlations based on empirical data, ingenious consciousness sees itself as free to understand the socio-cultural facts as it seems best.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the many introjected myths that sustained semi-intransitivity in the popular consciousness of closed societies, when a "cultural crack" does appear the emergent popular consciousness has an ingenuousness about it because the inhibiting myths of culture of silence have not yet been extrojected. Thus, although there is a general awareness of

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27. Ibid., pp.57-59.

domination, there is also present a fundamental ambiguity because now dominated man realized he is meant to be a "being-for-self", and not a "being-for-others". Now, he is dominated and knows he is dominated. The problem is, what to do about it. He is easy prey for the charisma of populist leadership.

Persons at this level of consciousness take the facts of their socio-cultural situation as unalterable "givens". Such a consciousness bestows on the socio-cultural facts a superior power that dominates the magical consciousness from outside and to which it can only submit with a pseudo-docility that is actually fatalism. This magical or "semi-intransitive" consciousness is not likely to question these facts, or these so-called socio-cultural "givens". This level of consciousness has been historically conditioned by the socio-cultural structures of the dependent societies which give rise to a magical consciousness that is, in fact, the popular consciousness.

The principal characteristics of this consciousness, as dependent as the society to whose structure it conforms, is its "quasi-adherence"; to objective reality or "quasi-immersion" in reality. The dominated consciousness does not have sufficient distance from reality to objectify it in order to know it in a critical way. We call this mode of consciousness "semi-intransitive".

Semi-intransitive consciousness is typical of closed structures. In its quasi-immersion in concrete reality, this consciousness fails to perceive many of reality's challenges, or perceives them in a distorted way. Its semi-intransitiveness is a kind of obliteration imposed by the objective conditions. Because

of this obliteration, the only data which the dominated consciousness grasps are the data which lie within the orbit of its lived experience. This mode of consciousness cannot objectify the facts and problematical situations of daily life. Men whose consciousness exists at this level of quasi-immersion lack what we call "structural perception", which shapes and reshapes itself from concrete reality in the apprehension of facts and problematical situations. Lacking structural perception, men attribute the sources of such facts and situations in their lives either to some super-reality or to something within themselves; in either case to something outside objective reality. It is not hard to trace here the origin of the fatalistic positions men assume in certain situations. If the explanation for those situations lies in a superior power, or in men's own "natural" incapacity, it is obvious that their own action will not be oriented towards transforming reality, but towards those superior beings responsible for the problematic situation, or towards that presumed incapacity. Their action, therefore, has the character of defensive or therapeutic magic.<sup>28</sup>

Freire assigns three attributes to those on the level of semi-intransitive consciousness. The attributes are fatalism, self-depreciation and emotional dependency.

Fatalism: Superficial analysis often confuses fatalism with docility when it comes to sizing up the national character of some peoples of the Third World. But such "fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of an historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people's behaviour." This kind of fatalism is almost always related to

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28. Freire, n.9, p. 461.

destiny or fortune -- forces beyond the control of man.

Under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed (especially the peasants, who are almost submerged in nature) see their suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as the will of God -- as if God were the creator of this "organized disorder".

Submerged in reality, the oppressed cannot perceive the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized. Chafing under the restrictions of this order, they often manifest a type of horizontal violence, striking out at their own comrades for the pettiest reasons .... Because the oppressor exists within their oppressed comrades, when they attack those comrades they are indirectly attacking the oppressor as well.

On the other hand, at a certain point in their existential experience the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and his way of life. Sharing this way of life becomes an overpowering aspiration. In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressor, to imitate him, to follow him. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in the middle-class oppressed, who yearn to be equal to the "eminent" men of the upper class.<sup>29</sup>

Self Depreciation: The oppressed at the level of semi-intransitive consciousness have no self-confidence. Their self-image is self-deprecatory because they have internalized what the oppressors think of them. They have come to believe that they really are "lazy, sick, stupid", and that only the boss-man actually is smart enough to know how to run things. In this regard, Freire's friend, Josue de Castro writes about how the Portuguese colonists imported the master-slave relationships from the great seignorial estates of Portugal when they

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29. Freire, n.4, pp.48-49.

came to Brazil and started growing sugar cane. And even after Brazil's first Peasant League was formed on the Calilee sugar plantation in the late 1950's, de Castro says: "It is noteworthy that after electing their first 'board of directors', the peasants, in a traditional gesture of humility, invited the plantations owner himself to be their honorary president."<sup>30</sup>

Emotional dependence: Because of their inauthentic view of the world the oppressed at the level of semi-intransitive consciousness also have an inauthentic view of themselves.

According to Freire:

The oppressed feel like "things" owned by the oppressor. For the latter, TO BE is TO HAVE, almost always at the expense of those who have nothing. For the oppressed, at a certain point in their existential experience, TO BE is not to resemble the oppressor but TO BE UNDER him, to depend on him. Accordingly, the oppressed are emotionally dependent.... This total emotional dependence can lead the oppressed to ... necrophilic behaviour.<sup>31</sup>

The next level of consciousness, (i.e., ingenuousness or semi-transitivity), is the popular consciousness:

The emergence of the popular consciousness implies, if not the overcoming of the culture of silence, at least the presence of the masses in the historical process of applying pressure

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30. Josue de Castro, Death in the Northeast, (New York, 1969), p. 15.

31. Freire, n 4, pp.52-53.

on the power elite. It can only be understood as one dimension of a more complex phenomenon. That is to say, the emergence of the popular consciousness, although yet naively intransitive, is also a moment in the developing consciousness of the power elite. In a structure of domination, the silence of the popular masses would not exist but for the power elites who silence them: nor would there be a power elite without the masses. Just as there is a moment of surprise among the masses when they begin to see what they did not see before, there is a corresponding surprise among the elites in power when they find themselves unmasked by the masses. This two-fold unveiling provokes anxieties in both the masses and the power elites. The masses become anxious for freedom, anxious to overcome the silence in which they have always existed. The elites are anxious to maintain the status quo by allowing only superficial transformation designed to prevent any real change in their power of prescription.<sup>32</sup>

As the static qualities of the culture of silence disappear, a dynamism begins to pervade social life and the contradictions of the old socio-cultural situation begin to come to the surface. The conflicts resulting in the emerging contradictions make the masses more demanding, and the elites more alarmed. As the theme of domination clarifies itself, intellectuals, academics and students -- all from elites of power -- begin to engage themselves in their own socio-cultural reality. The arts start to express the new situation and populism, a new political style, emerges because the old aristocratic forms are so obviously inappropriate.

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32. Freire, n.9, p. 463.



Although the emergence of the masses from silence does not allow the political style of the formerly closed society to continue, that does not mean that the masses are able to speak on their own behalf. They have merely passed from quasi-immersion to a naive transitive state of awareness. Populist leadership thus could be said to be an adequate response to the new presence of the masses in the historical process. But it is manipulative leadership -- manipulative of the masses, since it cannot be manipulative of the elite.

Populist manipulation of the masses must be seen from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it is undeniably a kind of political opiate which maintains not only the naivete of the emerging consciousness, but also the people's habit of being directed. On the other hand, to the extent that it uses mass protests and demands, political manipulating paradoxically accelerates the process by which the people unveil reality. This paradox sums up the ambiguous character of populism: it is manipulative, yet at the same time a factor in democratic mobilization.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the manipulative character of populism it does provide the possibility for the masses to begin to experience political participation. Not only that, it also provides for the collaboration of the intellectuals, students and the masses. In this way, populism in transitional societies can prepare the people for gaining the democratic experience of self-organization. As Freire says, "although it is an instance of manipulative paternalism, populism offers the possibility of critical analysis of the manipulation itself."<sup>34</sup>

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33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

Transitive-naive popular consciousness in emerging or "splitting" socio-cultural situations can, according to Freire, move to a level of maximum critical consciousness, or succumb to the pathology of fanatical or "inactional" consciousness.

This form has a mythical character which replaces the magical character of the semi-intransitive and naive-transitive states of consciousness .... Mass society is not to be associated with the emergence of the masses in the historical process, as an aristocratic eye may view the phenomenon. True, the emergence of the masses with their claims and demands makes them present in the historical process, however, naive their consciousness -- a phenomenon which accompanies the cracking up of closed societies under the impact of the first infrastructural changes.<sup>35</sup>

Critical consciousness is characterized by the profundity in penetration and analysis of problems. Because it deals with real causes, the equality of discourse is dialogical, not polemical. Although there is an assurance in argumentation, the assurance springs from neither ideology nor fanaticism. Because critical consciousness is the expression of humanization, there is also present an honest refusal to transfer or abandon responsibilities.

We have already discussed the ways of thinking that prevail in mass society, and what Freire has to say on this point is not novel or in any way unaligned with the formal statements of contemporary radical social critics.

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35. Ibid.

When popular consciousness does not become pathological, but develops into "maximum possible consciousness", (to use Lucien Goldman's phrase), we have, according to Freire, a condition in which the popular consciousness is habituated to scrutinizing its own "re-presentation of things and of facts so that they are seen in their empirical existence [and] in their casual and circumstantial correlations."<sup>36</sup>

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36. Alvaro Vieira Pinto, "Consciencia e Realidade Nacional", (Rio ISED-MED, 1961), quoted by Freire in La Educacion como Pratica de la Libertad, n.1, p. 94.

CHAPTER IV

FREIRE'S CONSCIENTIZACAO

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### FREIRE'S CONSCIENTIZACAO

Having discussed the 'culture of silence' and the 'historical levelling of consciousness' amongst the colonised, an attempt is made in this chapter to examine the process employed by Paulo Freire to overcome the state of torpor among the masses. The process or the method according to Freire is conscientizacao (conscientisation). The two main underlying philosophical themes in Freire's conscientisation method are contradiction, and praxis. In order to have a proper understanding of his conscientisation method, it is necessary to discuss briefly the philosophical undercurrents of Freire's methodology.

#### Philosophical Roots of Freire's Conscientisation

'Contradiction' forms a major part of Freire's theory and it appears that he has greatly been influenced by Mao Tse-tung. Mao argued that society is based on contradiction, and that unless we can understand the universality of contradiction, it is impossible to distinguish one thing from another, or even to demarcate the fields of science. Mao emphasized that the contradictions which are inherent in every stage in history can only be overcome by the use of suitable methods:

Qualitatively different contradictions can only be resolved by qualitatively different methods. For instance, the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie

is resolved by the method of socialist revolution; the contradiction between the great masses of the people and the feudal system is resolved by the method of democratic revolution; the contradiction between the colonies and imperialism is resolved by the method of national revolutionary war, and so on. Processes change, and old process and old contradictions disappear. <sup>1</sup>

Freire too, recognises that contradiction is present in all forms of objectively existing things and of subjective thought. In other words, he understood what Mao called, "the absoluteness of contradiction", and also, that each contradiction and each of its aspects have their respective characteristics. In Freire's works, one notices the continual use of the contradictions between 'domination' and 'subjection'. He terms this contradiction variously as: Oppressor-oppressed, coloniser-colonised, European countries-Third World, teacher-student, etc. Applying this contradiction between the above categories to his pedagogy, Freire explains that only when the contradiction is overcome will it be possible for man to develop a critical mind. This idea has been elucidated in his action-in-reflection matrix and in praxis.

Freire is of the opinion that it is

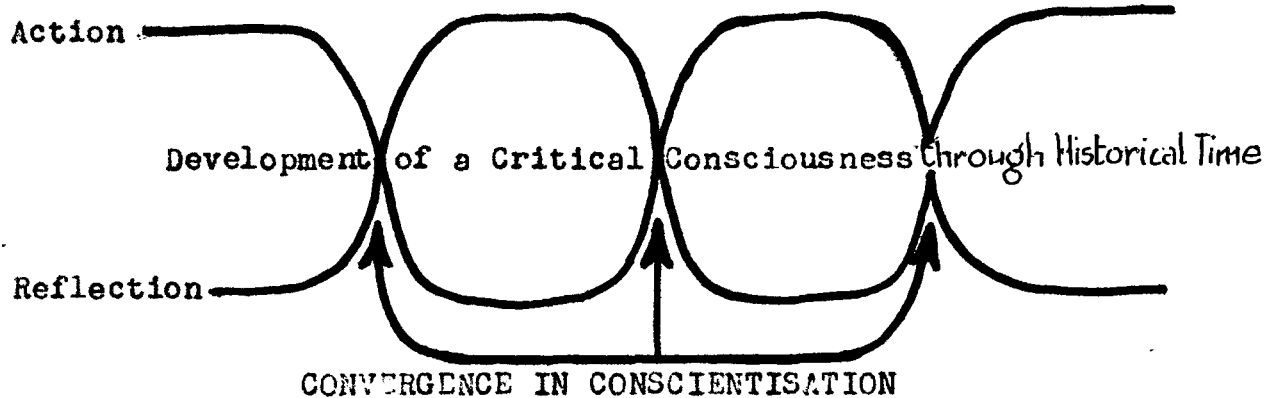
impossible to correctly envisage conscientisation as if it were an intellectual hobby or the constitution of a rationality separated

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1. Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, Vol.1, (Peking, 1967), p. 320.

from the concrete .... That is why we reaffirm that there is no conscientisation outside of praxis, outside of the theory-practice, reflections-action unity.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that action and reflection cannot be viewed outside the overall system of contradictions in the historical context. Bruce Boston has graphically described this in the following diagram:



Boston explains the above diagram thus:

Action and reflection are seen as two intertwining lines, situated in the force-field of culture. Conscientization is Freire's name for what happens at the various points of convergence along a historical continuum. Both action and reflection, and thus our future, are envisaged, changed and re-directed as a result of this convergence. Our lived cultural experience acts as a field of force which keeps the action and reflection lines from flying off the chart, and also keeps the lines from flattening out to from one-dimensional existence.<sup>3</sup>

2. Paulo Freire, Conscientisation and Liberation, (IDAC, Document No.1), (Geneva, 1975), p. 12.
3. Bruce O. Boston, "Paulo Freire: Notes of a loving Critic", in Stanley I. Grabowski, Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Education (New York, 1971), pp.83-4.

Freire, it appears has been equally influenced by Mao's ideas on contradictions as by the Marxist concept of praxis. Before Marx nobody had really stressed the importance of theory and practice. Lenin, in his well-known booklet, "What Is To Be Done", stated: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."<sup>4</sup> Stalin too emphasised that "theory becomes purposeless if it is not connected with revolutionary practice, just as practice gropes in the dark if its path is not illuminated by revolutionary theory."<sup>5</sup> Marxists in general hold that man's social practice alone is the criterion of his knowledge of the external world. Theory is essentially based on practice and in turn it serves practice. In Mao's words: "The truth of any knowledge or theory is determined not by subjective feelings, but by objective results in social practice."<sup>6</sup>

Seen against the background of these ideas, which emphasize the relationship between theory and practice, Freire's philosophical roots in Marxism becomes evident. Applying the concept of praxis to his pedagogy, he feels that within "any word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such

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4. V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done", Collected Works, Vol.5, (Moscow, 1961), p. 369.

5. J.V. Stalin, The Foundations of Leninism, (Moscow, 1954), p. 317.

6. Mao, n.l. pp. 293-7.



practical interaction that if one is sacrificed -- even in part -- the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a word is to transform the word."<sup>7</sup>

Freire calls the inauthentic articulation of the word as "verbalism". When we overexpress reflection, while neglecting action, we are sacrificing the true reflection, and so, instead of the real word, we will simply have bla, bla, bla, or a mere verbalism. Similarly when action is over-expressed, with a neglect of reflection, we are sacrificing the true action, and so, instead of the real word, we will have mere activism. Neither verbalism nor activism can constitute true human praxis by which man becomes a transformer. In other words, theory without practice and vice-versa, is an impossibility; as also, discussing facts without looking for their causes.<sup>8</sup> This understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, or action and reflection, forms the basis of Freire's model of change -- the core of his theory of conscientisation.

#### Conscientisation to Break Culture of Silence

We may now go deeper into his theory of conscientisation and discuss the means that he employs in the completion of this process. Freire views his theory of conscientisation as a specific panacea to the culture of silence.

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7. Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (London, 1975), p. 60.

8. Freire, Ibid., pp.60-2.

This culture of silence, seen as a form of collective unconsciousness amongst the colonised, cannot mechanically or automatically be transformed by infrastructural changes, achieved through mere reform. If social change has to take place there has to be a complete change in the social structure, and a complete transformation can only take place if the super-structure that the society is built upon also changes. Both super-structure and infrastructure, which make up the social structure, have to change simultaneously. Freire believes that for this change to take place one has to attack the roots of the social structure. For this he suggests a process of 'conscientisation'.

Looking at the 'culture of silence' historically and culturally it is clear that this 'culture of silence' has taken the form of 'peasant consciousness'<sup>9</sup> or, as Hegel saw it, as 'servile consciousness'. One should not be naive enough to think that just because the previously existing relationship -- between the dominative structure, the 'culture of silence' as super-structure, and the peasants' form of perceiving reality, and of acting on that reality -- no longer exists, the culture of silence has been wiped out. In actuality, this phenomenon is still very dominant in the underdeveloped countries.

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9. From the ICIRA Annual Report of 1968. (Chile, 1969), Peasant consciousness is seen in a dialectical relationship with the world, whereas in the idealistic conception, what happens is that consciousness creates the reality.

For any kind of social change to occur, there has to be a total revolution in ideas, and that indeed is a difficult task. Latin American societies depict a vestige of the colonial past, steeped in the myths of fatalism and superstition. This legacy has tendencies of 'reactivating' itself in favourable conditions. To be completely free of its problem the society has to be able to reach, in Althusser's terminology, the "dialectic of overdetermination". What he means by this is that in the process of transformation to a new man one has to be cautious, as the oppressed have a great tendency to follow the oppressors and initially they are unaware of their preferences. Frantz Fanon in the Wretched of the Earth, writes:

The colonised man will first, in the early stages of national independence manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up, and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing makers of crime in North Africa. When the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension. The settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious .... The native is always on the alert, for since he can only make out with difficulty the many symbols of the colonial world, he is never sure whether or not he has crossed the frontier.<sup>10</sup>

The attainment of national independence does not, by itself, signify an awakening. On the contrary, the new

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10. Frantz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth, (London, 1976), pp.40-41.

citizen is not even aware of his changed status. "While this new transitional structure should be initiating a rebirth to overcome the previous status as objects, or as beings-for-another, and start living as subjects, or as beings-for-themselves, the masses instead develop a dual consciousness."<sup>11</sup>

This dual consciousness prevents the peasants from perceiving beyond what Freire calls a "limit-situation". Limit-situation is seen as a microcosmic, isolated reality. This limited reality which exists amongst the peasants, is dominant because of the colonial past, which has moulded the oppressed into "limited" personalities. These limits on the peasants' lives are seen as real and not something to be challenged.

Lacking a structural perception of reality, this kind of consciousness appeals to magical explanations, findings in fate, or in a distorted vision of God. The coloniser, on the other hand, initiates a very involved plan of strategies and manipulative skills, preventing the colonised from formulating a complete picture of their own ethnic culture. This duality of consciousness is seen functioning in every aspect of the colonised. While dominated by the fear of freedom, they refuse to appeal to, or listen to, the appeals of others, or even to the appeals of their own conscience. Freire observes:

In the beginning stages of independence,  
these colonized prefer gregariousness to

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11. ICIRA, 1968 Annual Report - Agrarian Reform Training and Research Institute, (Chile, 1961), p. 230.

authentic comradeship; they prefer the security of conformity with their state of unfreedom to the creative communion produced by freedom and even the very pursuit of freedom.<sup>12</sup>

The oppressed by this time internalises this duality in their very core.

Their dual consciousness causes the oppressed to be apprehensive of freedom while realizing the necessity of it. Having internalised the consciousness of the oppressor, an intense conflict ensues within their own beings. The conflict entails the choice between discovering their true identity or remaining divided. They are unable to decide whether they want to be mere spectators or to take an active part in bringing about change in their society.

The denouement occurs only when the oppressed become aware of the actual reality. However, the oppressors through efficient manipulation and propaganda -- try to prevent the oppressed from attaining the humanisation of themselves. The oppressed will only gradually come to realize that an effective form of humanisation can only be reached through revolutionary leadership.

This revolutionary leadership must necessarily come from genuinely committed and rational persons, unlike the merchants, for example, who have a completely anti-scientific

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12. Freire, n.7, p.24.

attitude to social issues. They go to the extent of regarding the peasants as "lazy and incompetent", and, in general adopt a paternalistic attitude towards them. This paternalism helps in reactivating the 'culture of silence', and the oppressed fall into the clutches of these so-called 'helpers'. These helpers take the form of various AID agencies, which propagate neo-colonialism in an insidious manner. These mechanists in turn are prone to confusing the people between 'development' and 'modernization'.<sup>13</sup>

Freire distinguishes between real 'development' and mere 'modernization' -- which does not contribute towards creation of the complete being. Modernization only caters to the needs of the urban population, while the peasants who make up the majority of the population of any country are left out of the development matrix. Freire's pedagogy helps the peasants to realize their own concrete existential situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Freire has been able to develop his pedagogy, through his own experience in the poverty-stricken areas of Northeast Brazil. His pedagogy makes oppression and its causes, objects of reflection by the oppressed.

Being aware of the true motives of the oppressor, Freire observes:

It is a naive to expect the ruling classes to practise a liberating education which will make the masses realise the oppressive character of the rule by the privileged minority and which

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13. This dichotomy between 'modernization' and 'development' has been discussed more fully in Chapter III.

will enable people to dislodge the very same ruling classes.<sup>14</sup>

The alternative Freire advocates therefore is cultural action, that would confront and enter into conflict with the domesticating action of the capitalist ruling class. His cultural action is accompanied by a revolutionary leadership with a 'liberating' approach rather than a 'domesticating' one. He elaborates it by saying:

The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakeable solidarity. This solidarity is born only when the leaders witness to it by their humble, loving and courageous encounter with the people.<sup>15</sup>

His objective, therefore, is directed towards the unveiling of the obvious, in the sense that every man should be given the tools to perceive his objective reality. The first proposition advanced by him is that education can never be 'neutral'. Education is an act of knowing. The object of that knowing process is the real world, the reality which is lived daily by peoples and which must be known and transformed. From this definition of education -- the acquiring of a critical capacity and intervention on reality -- it is immediately obvious that there is no such thing as neutral education.

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14. Paulo Freire, Education for Liberation (Bangalore, 1975), p. 19.

15. Freire, n.7, p. 100.

All education has a goal or an intention, determined by the class correlations in society. The educational system is necessarily conditioned by the interests of the ruling classes. To study the objectives of education without analysing the problems of power would be incomplete. Thus Freire writes:

↳it is the transformation of society

The oppression of the masses, which is the problem of the exercise of power, was caused by the schools and therefore will not be solved by the mere transformation of the schools. Transformation of reality cannot be mediated by educational changes. That would be a Utopian panacea. On the contrary, ↳ by political action that will change education.<sup>16</sup>

Freire's New Education

Freire disapproves of the present educational system which he calls the 'banking system of education'. Education in this system tends to become narrative instead of dialogue, and 'knowledge' he says, "is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable, upon those whom they consider to know nothing."<sup>17</sup> This form of education prevents the student from <sup>creative</sup> gaining a critical insight and also minimizes the student's ↳ power. Freire thinks:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would

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16. Freire, n.14, p. 18.

17. Freire, n.7, p. 46.



result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world.<sup>18</sup>

In this 'banking concept of education' the students have no right to question the teacher. It becomes totally one-sided. Contradiction which is the most important factor in Freire's theory of development is absent in this kind of education. Instead, a relationship of domination and subjection appears -- domination exemplified in the teacher, subjection in the student. Freire's pedagogy helps to overcome this state of subjection.

Education is not imprisoned in the school. On the contrary, education is called on to demask its own political options, that is to say, "to define itself in relationship to the productive forces, the political power structure, and the dominant ideology of any given society."<sup>19</sup>

The alternative Freire suggests to overcome this one-sided relationship is to "problematize" the educational process. The key to "perception of perception" leading to the recuperation of hidden or "mystified reality", is problematization. Freire's alternative method involves the questioning of reality. This can only happen when the colonised through the process of conscientisation is able to reach the state of

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18. Freire, n.7, p. 52.

19. Paulo Freire, Cultural Action For Freedom, (London, 1975), p. 9.

critical consciousness. To be able to reach this stage of consciousness is a difficult task indeed.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Freire believes that this 'naive intransitive stage' could easily be overcome if one has the right perspective. This right perspective could be accomplished with the help of "a revolutionary educator", whose task would be to induce among the students a critical perspective. The "theoretical context" of problematization is "dialogue". Freire says, one should guard against dialogue degenerating into ideology. "In order to communicate effectively, educator and politician must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed."<sup>21</sup>

The practice of problematization demands a resolution of the teacher-student contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-student and the student-of-the-teacher ceases to exist and a new relationship is built up. The teacher no longer occupies the status he previously had, on the other hand, he "learns" along with the student. The authoritarian spirit slowly dies. "Whereas banking education anaesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality."<sup>22</sup>

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20. See Chapter III.

21. Freire, n.7, p. 69.

22. Freire, n.7, p.54.

This type of education is an education that propagates freedom while the former propagates domination. In this kind of education, man is not seen as an abstract being, or as an object, but as a subject. His relationships with people are governed by a subject-to-subject nature. In these relations it is seen that a consciousness of the man and the world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.

Contradictory to the banking education, this problem-posing education makes man much more perceptive. He is now able to see his own "limit-situation". He does not accept the world to be static, as given, but realises that every action of his is capable of transforming the present system. Man is seen as an historical being in this education, whereas in the former man's vital role in history is not acknowledged.<sup>23</sup>

Freire sees traditional education as "the unfinished character of man and the transformational character of reality as a necessity for education to be an ongoing reality."<sup>24</sup> Freire's pedagogy formulates a scientific-humanist conception, which finds its place in a "dialogical praxis."<sup>25</sup> In the

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23. See Chapter II for details.

24. Freire, n,7, p. 57.

25. "Dialogical praxis" includes within its ambit both reflection and action.

process of learning the teacher and the student become aware of the dehumanizing reality and therefore, denounce it. Their only aim is to transform this dehumanizing reality to a more liberated reality. The better the teacher and the student understand their state of oppression, the more critically conscious they become; in other words, 'conscientisation' takes place. "Their critical self-insertion into reality, that is, their conscientisation, makes the transformation of their state of apathy into the Utopian state of denunciation and enunciation a viable project."<sup>26</sup>

Education is thus constantly made and re-made in its praxis. The banking method, giving more importance to permanence and the functional state, is directed towards a society that caters to the needs of the status quo. Hence, this traditional education degenerates into a "reactionary education". Whereas it is commonly believed that schools shape society, Freire holds that it is society that shapes schools. Thus a man gets to "know" by his own efforts.

Equally clear is his thinking when Freire elaborates his methodology. The critical capacity, he says, grows out of a "dialogical" relationship between the teacher and the taught. Both of them act together in their effort to seek the reality of the "relevant" problems. The vocabulary is chosen not only

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26. Freire, n, 19, p. 42.

for their representation of the basic sounds of the language but also for their potential capacity to confront the social, cultural and political reality.

As a basis for the discussion Freire believed that he could isolate a "minimal core vocabulary" touching upon life situations. The deeply contextual orientations of the method is illustrated by the fact that Freire developed different lists of words and situations for rural and urban illiterates.<sup>27</sup>

The words which were chosen had a potential capacity to underline the social, cultural and political reality. Words which served as the basis for the process of learning to

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27. For example, the following lists of words were used in two different contexts: List I in the State of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and List II in the rural sections of Chile:

<u>LIST I</u>		<u>LIST II</u>	
<u>favela</u>	slum	<u>casa</u>	house
<u>terreno</u>	plot of land	<u>pala</u>	shovel
<u>batuque</u>	a popular dance	<u>vecino</u>	neighbour
<u>bicicleta</u>	bicycle	<u>sindicato</u>	union
<u>trabalho</u>	work	<u>radio</u>	radio
<u>salario</u>	salary	<u>yugo</u>	yoke
<u>profissao</u>	profession	<u>trabajo</u>	work
<u>governo</u>	government	<u>fabrica</u>	factory
<u>engenho</u>	mill	<u>pueblo</u>	people
<u>tijolo</u>	brick	<u>guitarra</u>	guitar

read and write were not chosen abstractly. They were accepted according to two criteria: (i) the familiarity of the word to the illiterates, and (ii) the usage of phonetics. The key words were first observed after a long examination of the "thematic universe", of the social group and more usually charged with experiences of daily life. This helped in a reflection on their daily reality. Finally, the words that were chosen were essentially those which grew out of the lives of the people and which had no independent existence apart from concrete reality.<sup>28</sup> In other words, it stimulates participants to move themselves by a realistic assessment, to a life of creative initiative. His educational process roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary.

Freire's method therefore, is not limited to mere literacy training but to 'conscientisation'. This word first appeared, according to Freire, in discussions of the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB) in the late 1950's, but the term conveyed minimal content until Freire heard it and realizing its implications, applied it to literacy training at about the

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28. Thus the first codification is the concrete reality. The first decodification is its interpretation by the people. The second codification is the tentative list of generative matrices. The second decodification is the research to draw forth knowledge of words and their uses from these generative matrices. The third codification systematizes the tally of generative matrices or themes. The last decodification is again by the people who grasp the programme of revolutionary action together with the literary tools of comprehending reality.

same time as the Movement for Basic Education (MEB), a system of radio-schools sponsored by the Brazilian bishops, also began to use it.

Freire's method of 'conscientisation', in its starkness, is nothing but a means of overthrowing the existing system, which caters only to the needs of the few. "Thoughtful and critical Latin Americans, no longer think of learning to read as acquiring a mere technical skill, but as a process implying values, forming mentalities and leading to social and political consequences. In fact literacy training may become revolutionary."<sup>29</sup>

Conscientisation -- the word also means "an awakening of consciousness, a change in a person involving a critical awareness of his or her own identity and situation in nature and in society; the capacity to analyse causes and consequences and to act logically and reflectively so as to transform reality."<sup>30</sup> What Freire calls praxis or reflection-in-action, is essential to the process.

Throughout his writings Freire gives considerable importance to perceiving reflection and action as part of the same process. He does not conceive the world as a static closed order but as a theatre of possibilities in which man can do his bit

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29. Thomas G. Sanders, "The Paulo Freire Method: Literacy Training and Conscientisation", in American Universities Field Staff Report, Vol. 15, No.1, (Chile, 1968), p.8.

30. David Millwood, "Conscientisation: What It's All About", New Internationalist, (June, 1974).

and get over his 'limit-situation'.<sup>31</sup> He reiterates that every action man is involved in, must never be dichotomized into action and reflection, but action along with reflection should be the rule.

Freire explains his theory of conscientisation in these words:

The work of conscientisation demands from those who consecrate themselves to it, a clear perception of the totality-partiality relationship, tactic and strategy, practice and theory. This work demands a no less clear vision than the revolutionary avant-gard must have of its own role, of its relationships with the masses of people.<sup>32</sup>

Freire's basic foundation is his political pedagogy. This is achieved through a process of demasking the existing social structure. Action and reflection are seen as part of the same process. Through this method of Freire's the oppressors are able to see critically their oppressive state. "Such a pedagogy, based on dialogue and the unity between action and reflection, is Freire's response to the 'process of ideologization' which the ruling classes use to manipulate the consciousness of the oppressed. This ideologization forces the oppressed to interiorize values which are not really their own ... and creates

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31. Limit-situation is contrasted to animals. For animals 'here' is only a habitat, for men 'here' signifies not merely a physical space, but also an historical space. Men, because they are conscious beings, exist in a dialectical relationship and as a result of this are able to overcome their limit-situation.

32. Freire, n.2, p. 13.



artificial conflict between different oppressed groups.<sup>33</sup>

Any break between education and politics is, for Freire, both impossible and dangerous. One cannot view education independently of the power structure which constitutes it nor can it be seen in isolation from the concrete reality in which it takes place. In a debate with Ivan Illich, Freire said:

It is not education which forms society in a certain way. It is society which having formed itself in a certain way, establishes the education to fit the values that guide the society. However, since this is not a mechanical process, the society which structures education to meet the interests of those who hold power then finds in education a fundamental factor for the preservation of this power.<sup>34</sup>

Education for liberation and political pedagogy are not, therefore, sufficient tools for changing the world.

Radical change implies the overcoming of the oppressive structures which determine the system of education, which form ideology and which programme the consciousness of the people. Freire's method implies the necessity of revolutionary process.

To conclude in Freire's own words:

If my option is revolutionary, it is not possible for me to consider the people as the object of my liberating act. If, however, my opinion is reactionary, the people will only be, as far as I'm concerned, a simple tool for my active preservation of the status quo within which I'm only interested in bringing of a few reforms.<sup>35</sup>

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33. IDAC Document No.8 (Geneva, 1975), p. 26.

34. Ibid., p. 28.

35. Freire, n.2, p. 15.

This self-explanatory statement, taken in relation with Paulo Freire's pedagogical method, is a clear indication of his revolutionary and political inclinations. It cannot be denied at any stage, that Freire's educational methods contain a revolutionary impetus and seeds for the overthrow of the status quo.

**CHAPTER V**

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Conscientizacao is a Portuguese word in usage even before Paulo Freire adapted it in his writings. The word, however, received international attention only after Freire infused in this word a new meaning and connotation. Since that time it has become controversial too. The junta that came to power in Brazil in 1964 following a military coup, accused Freire of subversion on the ground that his conscientizacao methodology of adult literacy education was opposed to the basic interests of the polity of Brazil.

Since the time Freire went into exile to Chile till today, he has been subjected to a variety of assessments of both commendation and condemnation by scholars and critics all over the world. The thrust of most such assessments is basically related to his concept of conscientisation. According to some critics, it implies 'philosophical error' and 'political irony'.<sup>1</sup>

The well known sociologist, Peter Berger raises two related questions in regard to Freire's contribution: whose consciousness is supposed to be raised, and who is supposed to

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1. See Bruce O. Boston, "Notes of a Loving Critic" in Stanley M. Grabowski, Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator (New York, 1971), pp.83-92, and Peter L. Berger, "The False Consciousness of Consciousness Raising", CCPD Document No.7, (Geneva, 1975), pp.1-8; Berger, Pyramids of Sacrifice (New York, 1976).

do the raising? To Berger, the consciousness raisers are the ideologists -- typically intellectuals ... who have gone through a long period of formal education and usually come from the upper middle or upper classes of their societies."<sup>2</sup> He goes further when he says, "a crucial assumption is that lower-class people do not understand their situation, that they are in need of enlightenment on the matter, and that this service can be provided by select higher-class individuals."<sup>3</sup> If that be conscientisation, then Berger argues that "intellectuals as a group know more about economics than peasants as a group .... For that, however, there is no evidence whatever [that] intellectuals may be superior to peasants in their information and perspectives on specific topics."<sup>4</sup>

More pertinent a question that Berger raises is the philosophical error implied in the conscientisation concept which is closely related to its political irony. For according to Berger: "Those who employ the concept usually see themselves as genuine democrats, close to the throbbing life of the "masses" and emphatically anti-elitist .... It is hard to imagine a more "elitist" program than one based on the assumption that a certain group of people is dehumanized to the point of animality ... and requires the ... assistance of others for both the perception and rescue operation."<sup>5</sup>

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2. Berger, "The False Consciousness of Consciousness Raising", n.l, p. 2.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

Much of Berger's criticism and in fact of most others, arises probably out of Freire's prose style which according to one commentator "is as plastic as the Portuguese language and at any moment a reader may stop and ask himself whether he has understood him aright."<sup>6</sup> In fact, Freire's consciousness raising does not necessarily imply any "hierarchy of consciousness", as many of his critics suggest.

Nor does it involve an elitist approach. The dialogic approach which constitutes the bedrock of Freire's educational system prescribes a constant and continuous dialogue between the coordinator and the students and emphasizes the importance of identifying such "generative themes" as will inevitably lead to the perception of oppression in different contexts and points of time. The task of conscientisation should be undertaken by such people who are not external to the situation of the people whose cause they are espousing. In fact "consciousness raising" is tantamount to a lesson in humility as Berger himself admits.<sup>7</sup> The political implication is essentially an injunction to be skeptical of any outsider's claim to superior knowledge of an insider's world which in fact, is the reason why Freire suggests that the 'consciousness raisers' must not be external to the situation -- the situation of oppression as Freire sees it.

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6. Richard Bourne, "Alternatives to School", Latin America Review I of Books (California, 1973), p. 81.

7. Berger, n.2, p. 5.

Another ground on which Freire has been subject to criticism in regard to his concept of conscientisation is the apparent affinity that critics find between his "consciousness raising" and the Marxian concept of "false consciousness". It is no doubt true that Freire had applied the Marxist tools and framework in much of his analysis. Because of this affinity some critics have questioned him and considered his contributions as 'problematic', because it is not linked either to a clearly defined class or to a theory of revolution. In reality however, Freire appears to be non-sectarian even though his writings have political overtones and a revolutionary message. However, a correct description of Freire is that he is a mixture of Marxism and his Roman Catholic beliefs. He, in fact, repeatedly warns his teachers who seek to "liberate" the "masses" that they must not assume to know everything. Again, Freire wrote about the oppressors and the oppressed and did not concern himself with possible divisions and cleavages within either of these two categories, and he does not talk about a 'revolution' after the phase of conscientisation. To him conscientisation in itself has a catalytic force which would not require either the logic of external events or the force of a revolutionary leadership to continue it into a revolution.

Be that as it may, a positive appreciation of Freire should take into account the logicity of the thought process  
the fundamental ideas  
and that his writings offer, and their relevance and applicability in the context of the Latin American political ethos

and to some extent, of the Third World countries in general. Freire has to be commended for the insight and understanding. His writings portray the contemporary Latin American political reality.

Being a product of Brazil's colonial experience, it had a direct impact on the moulding of Freire's thoughts. The early deprivations that he underwent influenced his ideas to a great extent. It was Freire's mission as a pedagogue to develop a method which would help obliterate the reminiscences of the colonial experience. Thus with his background and the influence of other social scientists such as Sartre, Marx, Fromm and others Freire developed a novel pedagogy. Freire identified the lacunae that existed in the present educational system. The existing educational system perpetuated the internationalisation of oppressive values. It also imposed on the oppressed values, beliefs and ideas of the exploiters, making them aspire to be no more than exploiters themselves.

To analyse Freire's contribution, it is essential to study the core ideas that govern his theory of conscientisation. The first core idea is his concept of man. Freire's ideal man is a 'critical', 'historical' and 'temporal' man, in sharp contrast to animals who are 'acritical', 'ahistorical' and 'atemporal'. In his writings, Freire has vividly portrayed that man, when colonised and in the chains of oppression is not unlike an animal, in the sense that he has not been able to develop his mental faculty and thus remained at the level of 'naive-intransitive consciousness -- a feature more akin to the



animal, Freire has also elaborated the importance of culture and history. Culture and history are seen as unique to man -- evolved by man and man alone. Therefore, man can only be viewed in a cultural and historical context.

From this distinction between man and animal, Freire, has created his ideal man or political man -- 'radical man'. Radical man is not merely a literate man, in the orthodox sense but he who realizes that to 'live' does not merely mean to 'exist'. Freire criticizes the orthodox schemes of modernization which aim at widespread literacy, but ignore the issue of 'raising' consciousness.

Freire distinguishes between 'modernization' and 'development'. The former inculcates values among the people that are not their own. It lacks any element of ethnicity; on the other hand the internalisation of the 'oppressor consciousness' is exacerbated.

In contrast, by 'development', Freire means the realisation of the concrete existential situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. 'Development' engenders participation by the masses in the process of change. Instead Freire sees 'modernization' and 'development' as antithetical to each other, each giving rise to a diametrically opposed form of consciousness.

To understand the levels of consciousness, the cultural-historical reality has to be viewed as a superstructure in relation to the infrastructure. Thus the 'culture of silence' that exists in the Third World countries are products of a larger

totality -- the metropole. 'Culture of silence', is born in the interaction of the metropole with the dependent society. In other words, the metropole exists only because of the Third World -- from which it sucks its own life and sustenance. Thus this culture is the product of the structural relations between the oppressor and the oppressed. The mode of consciousness that arises, is historically conditioned by the existing social structure. Freire enumerates three levels of consciousness. They are semi-intransitive, naive-transitive and critical consciousness. The semi-intransitive consciousness is typical of a rigidly closed stratified society. This kind of consciousness was characteristic of Brazil especially during its colonial phase.

When such a society, as a result of infrastructural changes, undergoes transition towards a greater degree of openness, the silent masses begin to manifest themselves. Silence is no longer seen as an unalterable given, but as the result of a reality which can and must be transformed. In this process of change, the popular consciousness is activated and the 'semi-intransitive' level of consciousness is transformed to the 'naive-transitive' consciousness. Accompanying this change, the masses tend to become more vocal and begin to exert pressure on the power elite. This unveiling provokes anxiety in both the groups -- the masses and the power elites. The power elites through their manipulative skills, try their utmost to keep the masses at the stage of 'quasi-immersion'.

The final stage is that of critical consciousness. This mode of consciousness is characterised by the fact that it seeks the real underlying causes in the interpretation of problems. Instead of magical explanations, it demands a rational discourse and has a taste for dialogue as opposed to polemics.

Freire's critique of the orthodox education system begins with his labelling this system as the 'banking system of education'. In such a system, the students are mere deposits of knowledge, lacking any perception of criticalness. The alternative suggested by Freire is an education that would provide a 'dialogue' with both the teacher and the student learning and thinking together. This inter-action between the teacher and the student enables the latter to become aware of the true reality. Reflection/action becomes the major theme. To engage in action/reflection is political because the contradictions in the human situation are explicitly exposed or revealed.

A second premise upon which Freire operates, and one which is equally laudable, is his insistence on the non-neutrality of education. It may be used as an instrument to indoctrinate the younger generations into accepting the values and beliefs of a given culture. Or, it could be, the 'cultural action for freedom', whereby men and women deal critically with their own reality and transform it to their own ends.

His cultural action for freedom rests on the fusion of theory and practice. Freire reiterates that theory without practice will lead to 'verbalism' and practice without theory has tendencies of degenerating into 'activism'. Thus theory along with practice should be the rule. Freire has evolved a theory of learning which tries to pose, in dialectical terms, the relationship between becoming aware and transforming action, between theory and practice, between study and involvement.

Seen in this background, Paulo Freire's theoretical enunciations for adult education offers a great deal in the realm of ideas which has meaning and relevance to the Latin American political ethos. No wonder therefore, to the lay Latin American intellectual, Freire's ideas are appealing because they are candidly aware that any political struggle or involvement is basically a social and cultural movement. To the devout catholic intellectual of Latin America, Freire with his intense and unrelenting faith in the religion, appears as the 20th century aspostle. To the radical and ideologically oriented Latin Americans too, Freire's philosophy is adequately agreeable for its Marxian flavour and revolutionary content.



APPENDIX - II

AN EXPERIENCE IN PERU\*

For the very reason that Lucho -- my Peruvian companion -- and I were among the few privileged of this world, we found ourselves in a position to question the very system that had given us benefits not accessible to others. Both of us were brought up in the best traditions of Western Humanism: both had been accorded most of the material, social and educational advantages in our respective countries.

But in spite of our privileged, middle-class backgrounds, we had both felt acutely the oppressions and alienations of the capitalist system in which we lived.

Lucho and I first met each other while working in the area of northern Peru devastated by the 1970 earthquake. The catastrophe provoked an unprecedented response from hundreds of aid-giving' organisations throughout the world. Each organisation, of course, had its own special formula for reconstructing the area, or for initiating 'long-term development projects'. Of these, technical co-operation, co-operative formation programmes and missionary activities were favourites. But it did

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\* David Reed, "An Experience in Peru", New Internationalist, (Geneva), June 1974, pp.8-11. A verbatim reproduction of a report prepared by David Reed of Institute of Cultural Action, Geneva, on the experience of Aymara Indians of the Peruvian altiplano who were introduced to Paulo Freire's method of conscientization.

not take us long to realize that such forms of 'aid' served only to hide the face of exploitation and misery behind a mascara of modernization. We saw all too clearly that such activities did not change social structures which were basically unjust; instead they facilitated the expansion of an exploitative economic system.

We rejected this concept of 'development' and began to seek other forms of expressing out solidarity with those on the periphery of Peruvian society. Inspired by the writings of Paulo Freire, we initiated a series of reflection groups with fishermen and peasants while we were still working in the earthquake zone. The success of those initial educational experiences, though brief, provoked a series of changes in Lucho and me that made us reconsider our way of relating to the oppressed. Eventually the changes that we underwent forced us to seek a means of becoming involved on a long-term basis with the marginalized. A modicum of financial support from the National Council of Churches in the U.S. let that desire become a reality.

Reed and Lucho chose to work with the Aymaras because the Indians' economic situation is critical: they earn barely \$100 a year from cattle, and are subject to an oppressive land tenure system. Here Reed discusses how he saw his role as a militant observer.

The essence of our relationship with the Aymaras is most aptly described by the term militant observer. This concept is based on the non-neutrality of the social sciences. The militant

observer is, on one hand, an active participant in a process of social change. But he is also a social scientist in a study of the socio-cultural reality in which he is living. Because these two aspects of his involvement complement each other, the militant observer is both a subject (moulding his own future) and an object (of study within the ongoing social process). His involvement also unifies theory and practice. The social scientist and the community in which he works, both try and define the nature of the social realities. Then they use theory to guide them both in their struggles to create their own future.

But it did not take long after being officially accepted into the communities to recognise that we were completely detached from the activities and people around us.

Our trial-and-error methodology began with the simplest possible activities. First we played football in an inter-community tournament. Being unable to run for more than fifteen minutes in the rarified atmosphere (3,800 metres above sea level), we drew little more than jeers from the sidelines. We offered to work with a group of men in the construction of an adobe house. Though our efforts were sincere, we probably delayed termination of the house by several days. When we offered to help dig potatoes during the harvest, we had few takers since our catastrophic first efforts had become known to all the villagers.

Almost imperceptibly, we became drawn into the immediacy of daily communal events. Thoughts about theory and sociology



gave way to concerns about the frost, or what price our neighbours had received for their cattle; who was going to be the patron of the upcoming festival and why everyone laughed so much about the latrine we were digging.

The limits of our world shrank to the territory we could cover in half a day's walk. Daily communication with the rest of the world depended on our transistor radio and word of mouth. And as the limits of our world shrank around us, our immersion into the Aymara culture increased. We slowly began to understand and feel the Aymara concept of self as a function of the all-encompassing motion of nature. We understood that the Aymara did not conceive of himself as we do -- in relation to other people; instead, he views the basis of his self-identity (if we can call it that) as derived from his harmonious relationship to Pachamama -- the Mother Earth. His sickness and his health, his joys and his sorrows, his fortunes and misfortunes are dependent on the maintenance of his harmony with nature. As we became absorbed in the community the same concepts of life began to affect the way we viewed our new environment. And in fact an entirely new world -- more profound, and requiring the use of different levels of our senses -- opened to us.

Our immersion in the Aymara culture was not a painless, automatic process. We suffered physically and psychologically in our new surroundings: walking fifteen kilometers across the barren plateau to get to the nearest town, having no heating or electricity, constantly eating starchy, protein-less foods,

drinking the hard mineral water -- all this slowly wore down our physical resistance. We were frequently sick and undernourished. I began losing my hair and we were plagued by stomach disorders.

This assimilation of a new culture was disorientating, but we were determined to continue. Our perseverance in participating in community events finally allowed us to enter into the confidence of the most respected community leaders. They had lost much of their fear that we were going to trick and exploit them; we too had become familiar enough with their ways of being that we could find a basis for honest discussion about their lives and problems.

With these community leaders, all of whom had a broad range of experience with capitalism, such as worked in the mines and seaports, we entered a new phase of our role as militant observers. Up to that point we had been students of their culture, trying to find a way of relating to them. Our assimilation into the community had been a phase of studying and understanding their culture.

The next stage is a more active participation -- although it falls considerably short of organising a political group. This stage begins with formal discussions between Reed, Lucho and the Aymaras.

Lucho and I accepted the responsibility of co-ordinating the initial study sessions. Our main role during this initial stage was to draw out the participants, to listen to the way they

perceived things. Then, taking their disparate interpretations and ideas, Lucho and I tried to organise the ideas in a coherent, comprehensive manner. The reformulated organised explanation then served the reflection group as the basis for a continued discussion about a given subject.

In this manner we discussed the cattle marketing cycle, land tenure problems, difference between capitalist culture and Aymara culture and relations with the government. We even made a general class analysis of Peruvian society. But all the time we were well aware that the reformulations that we made of their ideas were greatly influenced by our own Western sociological explanations. That was unavoidable. We were not capable of taking their ideas and arranging them in such a manner so as to correspond to the Aymara vision of the world.

Our transition from initiators of the study groups to normal, active participants, was not an accident. Nor were any of our interventions during our presence with the Aymaras haphazard. Each decision made vis-a-vis the community and the study groups was related to a series of tensions embodied in the role of the militant observer.

The most basic tension was in regard to the quality or form of our participation. Should our participation at any given moment be active or should it be passive? For instance, should we speak what we were thinking or should we remain quiet, observing, letting others speak or letting their silence speak for them. And if, when we decided to speak, would our intervention

be taken as the giving of a 'truth' -- as an imposition on the group -- or would our intervention be simply another contribution to the group reflection process?

Another tension relating to the form of our intervention was whether we were creating dependencies on ourselves or whether we were helping the group develop its leadership potential. When we led discussions were we impeding the growth and expression of other participants or were we providing material which would stimulate confidence and understanding? Often the group would mention a subject that was an obvious sore spot in communal life. Should we bring out those tensions at that moment or should the problem be left alone until a later date?

Our final tension constantly with us was whether to assume the role of the experts who had the answers for everything (and which gave confidence to the group), or to admit that we had no answers.

The fact that Reed and Lucho are outsiders works both ways: on the one hand, their participation could imply that they are imposing their own views; on the other, they can remain detached from the problems under discussion, and unhampered by family ties and values.

Taking a final look at our involvement in the Aymara reality, how can we best define our role as militant observers? First we reject his role as that of a paternalistic 'do-godder' who comes from the outside, bringing a 'new consciousness' or better ways of life. The only things we brought with us were our past

experiences, a desire to question our own culture and a willingness to struggle with the Aymaras. We were doing no favours for anybody by being there.

Secondly, the militant observer is not a manipulator who enters into contact with the social group -- in our case the Aymaras -- to impose a preconceived programme designed to drive the community towards a specific action. In reality we had no pre-packaged actions or answers to impose. To the contrary, we had only questions which we hoped could be answered through our involvement with the Aymaras. We were all students and teachers of each other, mutually helping each other to understand. And the answers which developed were products of communal discussion to be acted on in a communal fashion.

Finally, we reject the role of the militant observer as a cultural imperialist. If we carried elements and concepts from our culture, as was inevitable, we went away having acquired twice as many concepts from the Aymaras. The process was a bilateral cultural exchange which enriched us as well as the Aymaras.

We could best describe our role as that of an agitator but, as Latin American sociologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen defines it, only in the noblest sense of that word. We were social scientists who believed that through research and action we could increase understanding and contribute to a process of social change. We remained, throughout our involvement, social

agitators. As such we were equals with our hosts -- as two among many -- and we were all engaged in an intense learning process while struggling to create our own future.

One final note. Many people have asked me what has happened with the programme since I left. I reply simply "it continues" hoping that they will realize that it is the process, more than specific results, that is important. And if the inquirer stays around after hearing my curt answer, I'll ask in return "What are you doing in your community to write your own future".

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